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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an evaluation of Children Achieving, a systemic reform agenda designed to improve the Philadelphia public schools. Led by a dynamic superintendent, David Hornbeck, and central office personnel, Children Achieving focused on school-level accountability and significant increases in funding for public education. Between the 1995-1996 and 2000-2001 school years, reviewers interviewed hundreds of teachers, principals, students, parents, district officials, and civic leaders; sat in on planning/revision meetings; observed implementation in classrooms and schools; conducted two systemwide surveys of teachers; and carried out independent analyses of the district's test results and other indicators of system performance. Results suggested that what appeared to be the initiative's greatest strengths--the power of its ideas, the coherence of its plan, and the passion and commitment of its leadership--also posed obstacles to broad discussion of competing ideas and strategies, through which citizens could have explored ideas and leaders could have heard their concerns and made revisions. Children Achieving never became a shared community theory but remained the theory of a charismatic leader that was perceived differently by different civic leaders. An appendix presents research methods. (SM)

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Civic Engagement and Urban School Improvement: Hard-to-Learn Lessons from Philadelphia

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June 2002

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ABOUT THE CHILDREN ACHIEVING CHALLENGE

In February 1995, shortly after the School Board of Philadelphia adopted *Children Achieving* as a systemic reform agenda to improve the Philadelphia public schools, the Annenberg Foundation designated Philadelphia as one of a few American cities to receive a five-year $50 million Annenberg Challenge grant to improve public education.

Among the conditions for receiving the grant was a requirement to raise two matching dollars ($100 million over five years) for each one received from the Annenberg Foundation and to create an independent management structure to provide program, fiscal, and evaluation oversight of the grant. In Philadelphia, a business organization, Greater Philadelphia First, assumed this responsibility, and with it, the challenge of building and sustaining civic support for the improvement of public education in the city.

Philadelphia's *Children Achieving* was a sweeping systemic reform initiative. Systemic reform eschews a school-by-school approach to reform and relies on coherent policy, improved coordination of resources and services, content and performance standards, decentralization of decision-making, and accountability mechanisms to transform entire school systems. Led by a dynamic superintendent and central office personnel, *Children Achieving* was the first attempt by an urban district to test systemic reform in practice.

EVALUATION OF CHILDREN ACHIEVING

In 1996, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania and its partner, Research for Action (RFA), were charged by the *Children Achieving* Challenge with the evaluation of *Children Achieving*. Between the 1995-1996 and 2000-2001 school years, CPRE and RFA researchers interviewed hundreds of teachers, principals, parents, students, District officials, and civic leaders; sat in on meetings where the plan was designed, debated, and revised; observed its implementation in classrooms and schools; conducted two systemwide surveys of teachers; and carried out independent analyses of the District's test results and other indicators of system performance. An outline of the research methods used by CPRE and RFA is included in this report. A listing of the reports on *Children Achieving* currently available from CPRE is found below. There will be one additional summary report released in the coming months. It will be available when it is released on the CPRE web site at www.cpre.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHILDREN ACHIEVING'S THEORY OF ACTION

To assess the progress and effects of a comprehensive reform such as *Children Achieving*, it is essential to understand its "theory of action," that is, the assumptions made about what actions or behaviors will produce the desired effects. A summary of the *Children Achieving* theory of action follows:

Given high academic standards and strong incentives to focus their efforts and resources; more control over school resource allocations, organization, policies, and programs; adequate funding and resources; more hands-on leadership and high-quality support; better coordination of resources and programs; schools restructured to support good teaching and encourage improvement of practice; rich professional development of their own choosing; and increased public understanding and support; the teachers and administrators of the Philadelphia schools will develop, adopt, or adapt instructional technologies and patterns of behavior that will help all children reach the District's high standards.

ADDITIONAL READING ON CHILDREN ACHIEVING

The following publications on the evaluation of *Children Achieving* are currently available through CPRE at (215) 573-0700, or email your requests to cpre@gse.upenn.edu.

- Recruiting and Retaining Teachers: Keys to Improving the Philadelphia Public Schools (May 2001)
- School Leadership and Reform: Case Studies of Philadelphia Principals (May 2001)
- Contradictions and Control in Systemic Reform: The Ascendancy of the Central Office in Philadelphia Schools (August 2001)
- Clients, Consumers, or Collaborators? Parents and their Roles in School Reform During *Children Achieving*, 1995-2000 (August 2001)
- Powerful Ideas, Modest Gains: Five Years of Systemic Reform in Philadelphia Middle Schools (December 2001)
- An Analysis of the Effect of *Children Achieving* on Student Achievement in Philadelphia Elementary Schools (February 2002)
- Civic Engagement and Urban School Improvement: Hard-to-Learn Lessons from Philadelphia (June 2002)

AUTHORS' NOTE

The research reported herein was conducted by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education and Research for Action. Funding for this work was provided by Greater Philadelphia First and the Pew Charitable Trusts. Opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Greater Philadelphia First, the Pew Charitable Trusts, or the institutional partners of CPRE.

CHILDREN ACHIEVING EVALUATION 1995-2001: RESEARCH METHODS

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education and Research for Action used the research methods indicated below in their evaluation of the *Children Achieving* Challenge.

1. 1996-2000 school-level data on indicators that made up the District's Performance Responsibility Index including student scores on the SAT-9, student promotion and graduation rates, student attendance, and teacher attendance.

2. Two census surveys of teachers, the first in 1997 and the second in 1999. Teachers were asked about reform implementation, school conditions, and teaching practices. There was a greater than 60 percent response rate on both surveys.

3. School indicators describing teacher and student characteristics in 1996 and 1999 obtained from the School District of Philadelphia's Information Services. These data included school enrollment, number of teachers, the proportion of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, among other indicators. These data were used for descriptive purposes and in hierarchical linear and logistic regression models to help understand the relationships among reform implementation, student outcomes, and school characteristics.

4. Five years (1995-1996 through 1999-2000) of qualitative research in 49 schools (26 elementary, 11 middle, and 12 high schools) in 14 clusters. Qualitative research included: interviews of teachers, principals, parents, outside partners who worked in the schools, and in a few cases, students; observations of classrooms, small learning communities meetings, professional development sessions, and school leadership team meetings; review of school documents (School Improvement Plan, budget, etc.); and intensive, multi-year case study research in a subset of 25 schools (13 elementary, 5 middle, and 7 high schools).

5. Interviews of central office and cluster staff and observations of meetings and other events.

6. Interviews of 40 Philadelphia civic leaders (including political leaders, leaders in the funding community, public education advocates, journalists, and business leaders).

In addition, numerous other studies conducted during *Children Achieving* informed this evaluation. These included: Bruce Wilson and Dick Corbett's three-year interview study of middle school students; an evaluation of the Philadelphia Urban Systemic Initiative in Mathematics and Science conducted by Research for Action; the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study conducted by Frank Furstenberg at the University of Pennsylvania; and the evaluation of the William Penn Foundation's initiative in two clusters, conducted by the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1994, David Hornbeck came to Philadelphia with a bold plan to do what "no city with any significant number and diversity of students" had ever done before: help "a large proportion of its young people achieve at high levels."[1] Trained as an attorney and minister, Hornbeck had served as Commissioner of education in Maryland and had been one of the architects of Kentucky's Education Reform Act, a standards-based reform effort that coupled school-level accountability with significant increases in funding for public education. Philadelphia's corporate and civic leaders and its Democratic mayor, Ed Rendell, were impressed with Hornbeck's credentials and saw standards and accountability as a potentially winning formula for Philadelphia's poorly performing schools. They looked to him to turn the system around.

Shortly after the Philadelphia School Board adopted Hornbeck's *Children Achieving* reform program, the Annenberg Foundation designated Philadelphia as one of three American cities to receive a five-year $50 million Annenberg Challenge grant.[2] (See Sidebar 1 at the end of this section for a timeline of the *Children Achieving* initiative.) The stars seemed aligned for real educational improvement. One local foundation staff member expressed the prevailing view: "We believe that if not now in Philadelphia, then when?"[3]

But in June 2000, in the face of a huge budget deficit, declining support from newly-elected Mayor John Street, and the threat of a state takeover, Superintendent Hornbeck resigned, rather than oversee the dismantling of his vision for a system in which all children would achieve at high levels. Within a year, Pennsylvania contracted with Edison Schools, the largest for-profit provider of educational services in the country, to review the District and provide recommendations for a major overhaul of the city's public schools. By December 2001, the Governor and Mayor Street agreed to terms for the state to take direct control over Philadelphia's public school system — a move originally contested by Mayor Street. Under the "friendly" takeover, a five-member School Reform Commission (SRC) — three members appointed by the Governor and two by the Mayor — replaced the Board of Education. The SRC quickly took the unprecedented step of requesting proposals from private firms, institutions, and community organizations to perform a sweeping array of central office functions. At the time that this report went to press, Edison Schools had assumed the role of "senior management consultant" and the SRC had chosen a variety of sponsoring organizations, including national for-profit education management organizations and community groups, to run 70 of the District's lowest performing schools.

Ironically, although *Children Achieving* was publicly discredited by local and state leaders, the reform had made headway during its six years of implementation. Elementary school students showed significant improvement on the SAT-9 test (the Stanford Achievement Test-Ninth Edition), the District's standardized test measure. And public education had become a front-page story in a city where there had been apathy and little discussion. Public reporting of school-by-school test data and data disaggregated by race/ethnicity and income level had set the

[1] School District of Philadelphia, *Children Achieving strategic action design*. Philadelphia: Author, 1995, p. i.

[2] For a further discussion of the role of the *Children Achieving* Challenge and Greater Philadelphia First in *Children Achieving*, see the section entitled, "*Children Achieving*: A Calculated Risk."

[3] Foundation staff, 1996.

stage for educators to be held accountable for results. Community organizing and a public information campaign had encouraged greater public engagement. In fact, some believed that the District's progress during *Children Achieving* had been remarkable and were incredulous that there was not broader acknowledgment of Philadelphia's achievements:

Philadelphia made a remarkable amount of progress masked by political turmoil in the District, city, and state. And it made progress even with union opposition, with a split board against David, and with critics of David at the city and state levels.

Philadelphia launched an almost decade-long effort to restructure its schools into smaller communities. There were demonstrable results in improvements on the accountability index. Attendance increased, showing greater student engagement. There was an increase in performance at lower levels of progress — with the students below basic and basic. The creation of organizations like the Alliance Organizing Project shows progress. And along with that, efforts to develop standards at the local level demonstrated progress. Teachers were also given the tools to put standards into practice with curriculum frameworks.[4]

Why were the District's accomplishments not more widely recognized? What was it about the vision, strategies, and style of reform leaders; the reform plan and its implementation; the views and actions of government, business, and civic leaders; and the larger economic and political context that produced a shift toward a radically different model of school reform?

In this report, we examine how reform leaders — faced with the daunting task of improving student achievement while the dollars available for public education were actually shrinking — tried to build the public support necessary to convince lawmakers that an increase in spending would be a sound investment. We tell the story from the perspectives of Philadelphia civic elites. Interviews with more than 40 of Philadelphia's leaders from government, business, civic organizations, higher education, the media, and the School District during the period January 2000-January 2001 serve as the basis for our account. (See Appendix A for a discussion of our research methods.)

From its inception, *Children Achieving* was a calculated risk by District leaders who believed that they could effect sufficient gains in student achievement to convince the public and political leaders to increase the dollar investment in the city's schools. Initially, the *Children Achieving* reform plan was championed by key sectors of the community — the business and foundation communities, civic leaders, and the mayor. However, a deeper reading of the interview transcripts revealed that, in fact, our informants had varying and sometimes competing interpretations of the reform's major ideas and how those ideas would work together to effect improvement in schools and student achievement. Our research shows how difficult it is to create resilient civic coalitions that persist in the face of the harsh circumstances of inadequate funding. It signals the problems that arise for reform leaders as they try to communicate easily-understood messages about complex ideas like standards, accountability, and decentralization and as they report student progress on leading achievement indicators within a context of very low absolute performance.

WHY THIS REPORT IS IMPORTANT NOW

A premise of Ambassador Annenberg's unprecedented gift to American public education was that "something should be

[4] Civic leader, October 2000.

done to improve [public schools] and that something *could* be done,"[5] and that a city's leaders and citizens were key to the success of its schools.

Schools would improve only when communities realized it was in their own best interests to take the tough political steps necessary to provide a good education for every child. They would improve when private citizens and institutions became willing to invest substantial amounts of time, energy, and money in public education — not just for their own children, but for "other people's" children as well. Annenberg hoped his own financial commitment would galvanize this nationwide effort in localities around the country, with his dollars matching new ones that local planners would raise.[6]

The Annenberg Challenge's emphasis on civic engagement was well justified to many who have studied urban school reform and analyzed its failures in cities such as Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, San Antonio, San Francisco, and Seattle. These educational policy analysts argue that deep and enduring reform requires more than a strong leader with a plausible plan. Leaders of a city's important institutions and grassroots groups must offer critical support. Additionally, educational theorists currently argue that reformers must be flexible in their development of reform approaches. They believe that no single approach to educational reform offers a sufficiently robust strategy to turn failing urban school districts around.[7]

Public schools in Philadelphia are about to enter into a new educational experiment, one that puts school governance in the hands of the state and involves private enterprise and community groups on an unprecedented scale in the running of central office functions and the operation of schools. Is civic engagement in public schools even relevant under these circumstances? Historians and political scientists who have researched this question would argue, "Yes." In their study of civic engagement in public schools in 11 cities, Clarence Stone and his colleagues found that educational improvement faltered when there was low civic capacity for reforming schools.[8] In two of the cities studied, schools were governed by court order as a result of desegregation cases. In both cases, public engagement was low in part because citizens considered the schools to be the domain of the courts. Will Philadelphians and others sit back and relegate improvement of the city's schools to the School Reform Commission? To date, state takeovers of urban districts have proved moderately successful at ameliorating financial crises and cleaning up graft. Thus far, they have not succeeded in improving educational programs and raising student achievement.[9]

It is likely that the public will remains a crucial factor in reform's success — no matter what the governance structure. The past offers some lessons about how to accomplish this. This report offers the larger public a framework for evaluating what the new players in Philadelphia schools propose and undertake. (We believe the framework is also useful to

[5] B. Cervone and J. McDonald, *Preliminary reflections on the Annenberg Challenge: A working paper drawn from its first projects*. Providence, RI: Annenberg Challenge, 1999, p. 1.

[6] Ibid, p. 4.

[7] P. Hill, J. Harvey, and C. Campbell, *It takes a city: Getting serious about urban school reform*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000.

[8] C. Stone, *Civic capacity and urban education*. Unpublished manuscript, 2001, available at http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gupt/stone/prob.html.

[9] K. Wong and P. Jain, "City and state takeover as a school reform strategy." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Seattle, WA, November 2000.

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citizens in other cities.) During the coming months, a variety of strategies for improving schools will emerge. Each of these proposed reforms is, in fact, a theory of action about how to improve education. Schon and Argyris elaborated and used the concept of theory of action in their work on the organizational change process.[10] A theory of action is the assumptions and beliefs that leaders hold about how change will occur; in the case of educational reform, how reform components will effect the desired improvements in schools, classrooms, and students.

In this report, we discuss the theory of action underlying *Children Achieving* at length. We also identify other theories about how to raise student achievement that emerged in our interviews with city leaders. We do this so as to make these various approaches explicit. In order for citizens to assess the potential of proposed reforms and the success of enacted ones, it is important that they understand reformers' assumptions about the causal links between a reform's design, its activities, and its goals. It is important to ask such questions as: What do reformers believe about how their proposals will effect improvement? Are their assumptions logical? Are the proposals robust and strategic? Are their theories of action based on past experience, empirical evidence, or ideology? And questions about the values underlying reform proposals and their attention to issues of social justice and equity are extremely important in a city where more than 80 percent of students are children of color who live in poverty. Whose interests are being served by proposed approaches to reform? In short, it is important to understand and question the theories of action underlying the changes proposed by reformers so that the public can protect the interests of the community's children and increase the likelihood that they will benefit from the proposed reforms.

[10] C. Argyris and D.A. Schon, *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

We begin with a description of Philadelphia and its schools at the time of Superintendent Hornbeck's arrival. What was the educational situation prior to *Children Achieving*? What were the existing relationships between the District and key sectors of the city, including business, government, and civic organizations? We also discuss our informants' varying perspectives on the challenges that confronted the city. Their different views on Philadelphia's problems and their relationship to public education set the stage for differing assessments of *Children Achieving*'s success.

Children Achieving was an ambitious and comprehensive reform plan. We outline the plan and discuss how its elements were intended to work together to improve schools and student achievement. In order to understand civic leaders' assessments of *Children Achieving*'s impact, it is important to know how they interpreted its foundational ideas and key components. How did various groups make sense of the plan articulated by District leaders? How did they think it was supposed to work? We then detail six strategies of District leaders to build public support for the reforms. We reveal the effects of District leaders' steps and missteps as they sought to gain more funding for schools and the larger contextual factors that constrained their visions and strategies. There were significant accomplishments during *Children Achieving* and there are important lessons from its disappointments. Finally, we summarize these from the perspectives of our interviewees in order to define common ground for moving forward.

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SIDEBAR 1. CHILDREN ACHIEVING TIMELINE

August 1994

- David Hornbeck appointed Superintendent of Philadelphia schools.
- Philadelphia Federation of Teachers contract settled.

October 1994

- *Philadelphia Inquirer* publishes "District in Distress," its first report card on the state of Philadelphia public schools, including information on poverty rates, dropout rates, teachers' salaries, and student performance on the SAT-9.

November 1994

- Tom Ridge (R) elected Governor of Pennsylvania.
- Mayor Ed Rendell (D) re-elected.
- As part of a desegregation case against the District, Judge Doris Smith orders the School District to submit a plan for reducing racial disparities in student achievement. This comes after an education panel's findings paint a dismal portrait of the Philadelphia school system, citing "an overall attitude of helplessness and resignation" about several aspects of the District among school staff and from citizens.

February 1995

- *Children Achieving* Action Design published.
- Philadelphia receives a $50 million Annenberg Challenge grant, which is matched by $100 million from Philadelphia corporations, foundations, and federal grants. Greater Philadelphia First (GPF) announced as administration site for grant, the *Children Achieving* Challenge, and Vicki Phillips is named Executive Director of the Challenge.

May 1995

- Five months after taking office, Governor Ridge proposes a statewide voucher plan, which would provide families throughout Pennsylvania with school vouchers that could be used at private, religious, or out-of-district public schools. This is the first of Ridge's three pushes to establish a statewide voucher program, none of which were able to garner needed legislative support.

September 1995

- First six clusters formally established.
- City Council President John Street criticizes the *Children Achieving* agenda for being too complicated.

December 1995

- Standards Writing Teams, composed of parents, teachers, and community members, are convened; writing of new academic standards begins.

SIDEBAR 1. CHILDREN ACHIEVING TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

February 1996

- *Philadelphia Daily News* publishes a series of opinion columns that criticize Superintendent Hornbeck and *Children Achieving*. They kick off a series of articles and opinion pieces called, "The Great School Debate."

August 1996

- Standards distributed to teachers for review.

September 1996

- All 22 clusters established.
- Family Resource Network established to provide support to families.

January 1997

- State Representative Dwight Evans announces legislative proposals to write certain aspects of Philadelphia's education reforms into law.

February 1997

- Hornbeck announces plan to reconstitute Olney and Audenried High Schools, drawing harsh criticism from school staff. The plan is abandoned when an external mediator judges the process invalid.
- Mayor Rendell, City Council President Street, Superintendent Hornbeck, School Board members, and community leaders issue, *Realities Converge: This Year is Different*. The report details the origins of the District's fiscal crisis and its future plans for managing the deficit. The authors promised a zero-growth School District budget but "drew a line in the sand" and refused to cut any more school-based programs.
- District, city, and community leaders file lawsuit against the state contending that Pennsylvania does not provide a "thorough and efficient" education. Case later dismissed by state Supreme Court, which ruled that school funding decisions must be made by the legislature, not the courts.
- City Council President John Street, then a candidate for mayor, makes his first public foray into working with the public on the issue of education by convening the Philadelphia Education Summit. The Summit aimed to stimulate a broad discourse on public education issues through televised forums, focus groups, town meetings, and a major conference.

September 1997

- Professional Responsibility Index (PRI) scores made public for the first time. The PRI, which had been adopted the previous year by the Board of Education, is intended to provide each school with a sense of where it stands along several dimensions, including: standardized tests, student and teacher attendance, and promotion and dropout rates. This marks the first reporting period of the first two-year accountability cycle (measuring progress from 1996-1998). Much of the data released at this time are made public for the first time in the District's history. A number of schools show low progress.

SIDEBAR 1. CHILDREN ACHIEVING TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

January 1998

- Graduation and promotion requirements identified.
- Vicki Phillips resigns as Executive Director of the *Children Achieving* Challenge. Suzanne Becker replaces her.

February 1998

- Hornbeck threatens to adopt an unbalanced budget if the state does not provide needed funds, which could lead to the schools closing before the end of the school year.

March 1998

- The District, city, and other officials and interest groups file a federal civil-rights suit against the state, known as Powell v. Ridge. The plaintiffs contend that the state's funding practices discriminate against school districts with large numbers of non-White students.

April 1998

- State legislature responds by passing Act 46, a draconian state takeover law aimed specifically at Philadelphia.

March 1999

- Members of GPF's board stand behind Governor Ridge when he introduces his second statewide voucher proposal, designed to provide vouchers to students in the most academically troubled school districts throughout Pennsylvania. Again, he lacks the legislative support needed to pass the proposal.

November 1999

- Street is elected Mayor. His role in public education is expanded during this election when Philadelphians pass a referendum to change the City Charter to allow the Mayor to appoint all members of the School Board with terms concurrent to his own.

January 2000

- Street appoints new educational leadership in Philadelphia. He selects a new School Board, the first time this has happened in the history of Philadelphia. He retains several, but not all, members of the previous Board. Street also appoints the first Secretary of Education for the city, Debra Kahn, who is charged with leading the District's team in negotiation of a new teachers' contract.

March 2000

- Mayor Street holds community meetings about education issues in all 22 clusters. At meetings, he solicits input about the schools and warns community members of a looming fiscal crisis, asking that they demand an adequately funded school system from elected officials at the state level.

SIDEBAR 1. CHILDREN ACHIEVING TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

May 2000

- The Pennsylvania Legislature passes and Governor Ridge signs the Education Empowerment Act, a state reform and "takeover" bill targeted at 11 school districts (including Philadelphia) with high student failure rates.

June 2000

- Threat of state takeover crisis in the District during the Republican Convention in Philadelphia is averted by a financial settlement between the District and Governor Ridge. Still facing a deficit, the School Board cuts the budget and Hornbeck resigns in protest.
- School District announces number of teaching vacancies.
- School Board adopts a FY2001 budget with an amount deficit.

August 2000

- Teacher contract expires, beginning two months of tense negotiating between the union and the Board of Education. Teachers authorize a strike, but continue to work with the knowledge that the District could impose new terms of employment at any point. Shortly thereafter, the Board of Education does impose new terms and conditions of employment. The union strikes over a weekend. The contract is settled before school is disrupted with the intervention of Mayor Street and pressure from Governor Ridge, who threatens a state takeover.
- Board of Education announces decision to adopt a corporate style of management. Deidre Farmbry, a veteran Philadelphia educator, appointed Chief Academic Officer.

October 2000

- Philip Goldsmith, a lawyer and journalist, appointed interim Chief Executive Officer of District.

January 2001

- *Education Week* gives Pennsylvania a grade of "D-" on funding equity in comparison to other states. It is followed by only seven other states.

May 2001

- Governor Ridge succeeds in passing an education plan that exchanges an increase in teacher pensions for a package of education bills that many observers perceive as a backdoor to vouchers. The package includes bills that provide state tax credits of up to 90 percent to corporations for donations to groups that finance scholarships to private schools or public schools outside of students' home districts.
- As an economy measure, the District's 22 clusters are replaced by eight academic offices, reducing administrative costs and reassigning some cluster staff to teaching positions. At month's end, the School Board adopts a budget with a $216 million deficit, creating a new fiscal crisis with state takeover of the District possible.

SIDEBAR 1. CHILDREN ACHIEVING TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

July 2001

- Mayor Street and Governor Ridge sign a Memorandum of Understanding giving the Governor permission to commission an analysis of the financial and educational state of the District. Ridge hires Edison Schools to do the job.

October 2001

- In the aftermath of September's terrorist attacks, President Bush appoints Governor Ridge to U.S. Office of Homeland Security. Lt. Governor Mark Schweiker replaces him.
- Governor Schweiker passes stealth amendment to Act 46, the state takeover law. It gives the state increased power over the governance body outlined in the act.
- Schweiker releases his proposal for the District, based heavily on Edison's analysis of the District. It includes plans to have a private education management organization (presumably Edison Schools) run the central administration and to have Edison run at least 45 schools. The Mayor and Governor have a month to negotiate a deal or the state has authority to take over the District.

November 2001

- Governor Schweiker backs off of his proposal to have Edison run the District's central administration, but keeps them in a consulting role to the central office and as a private manager of schools.

PHILADELPHIA AND ITS SCHOOLS

THE CITY

The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were disastrous years for Philadelphia. When David Hornbeck began his tenure as Superintendent, the city was recovering from a serious fiscal crisis during which it was forced to borrow $150 million from its employee pension fund just to stay afloat. With its credit ruined, the city had to pay more than $5 million to obtain the loan, a fee equivalent to a 24 percent interest rate.[11] From a peak of 2.1 million in the 1950s, population had dropped precipitously to the current level of 1.4 million.[12] The city lost 80 percent of its manufacturing jobs, and the total number of jobs dropped from a high of 800,000 to 250,000 during the same period. These trends have slowed, but still continue.[13] And the economy of the greater Philadelphia region, while not as bleak as the city's, is certainly sluggish in comparison to many other large metropolitan areas which experienced strong growth during the 1990s.[14]

Philadelphia citizens and corporations bear one of the highest tax burdens in the country. City residents pay a wage tax just below five percent and most city leaders attribute the city's loss of jobs as well as population largely to the wage tax. For their part, corporations pay a business privilege tax that taxes both the net income of a business and its gross receipts. (This means that the city is taxing a business whether it shows a profit or not.) In 1998, Philadelphia was judged as having the highest business tax burden in the country.[15] One reason for this devastating tax burden is that the city is co-terminus with the county which means that residents must bear the full weight of paying for county as well as city services. A second reason is that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is a "low tax state" and its aid to cities is also low. The taxing dilemma has been termed the Gordian Knot, "not amenable to unraveling even with the best of intentions and considerable resources."[16]

During his eight-year tenure, which began in 1992, Mayor Ed Rendell brought Philadelphia back from financial collapse, creating a small budget surplus before he left office in 2000.[17] His tough stance during a strike of city workers early in his administration won accolades from the business community, as the city ultimately negotiated more discretion for management. Democrat Rendell worked with Republican state officials to bring jobs to Philadelphia, and by 1997 the local economy showed a mild upswing, with a

[11] M. de Courcy Hinds, "A $150 million loan buys Philadelphia some time," *The New York Times* (1991, January 6), p. 14.

[12] Metropolitan Philadelphia Policy Center, *Flight (or) fight: Metropolitan Philadelphia and its future.* Philadelphia: Author, 2001.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] B.J. Whiting, *Philadelphia: Prospects and challenges at the end of the decade.* (Report to the Pew Charitable Trusts, 1999.)

[16] Ibid, p. 29.

[17] The Mayor even succeeded in making Philadelphians proud of their city again. (This was no easy feat, given the image Philadelphia conjured up for many Americans — an entire city block in flames after Mayor Wilson Goode and his managing director dropped a bomb on the headquarters of the radical group MOVE.) Putting tourism at the center of Philadelphia's economic renewal, Rendell flamboyantly promoted "the city that loves you back." Perhaps the city and Rendell's greatest accomplishment, at least symbolically, was attracting the Republican National Convention — an irony given that by the time of the convention, in August 2000, Rendell, no longer mayor, was the Democratic National Committee Chair.

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net gain in jobs that reversed a trend of several decades.[18]

However, the financial picture of the Philadelphia School District worsened during this period because the state froze its formula for providing funds to local districts in 1993. The formula takes into account the number of pupils, the special needs of the District, its ability to raise local taxes, and other factors. After 1993, state aid to the District no longer rose in response to increases in enrollment. On a per-pupil basis adjusted for inflation, the real value of state education funds coming to Philadelphia actually decreased by 5.9 percent between 1993 and 1998.[19]

During *Children Achieving*, the School District's per-pupil spending was well below what was being spent by districts in surrounding counties, by as much as $5,443 per student.[20] Teacher salaries were also higher in suburban schools. Average starting salaries in the suburbs were over $3,500 higher than starting salaries in Philadelphia and maximum salaries were over $9,000 higher.[21]

Philadelphia's Board of Education had the responsibility for setting policy and spending priorities, but it had no taxing power. City Council levies taxes.[22] Under these circumstances, it's not surprising that when Superintendent Hornbeck went to the Mayor and City Council for increased funding for schools, they were resistant. Neither was willing to risk the financial jeopardy or political heat that increased city taxes to fund the schools would generate. Their response was that the city had "stretched its taxing ability to the limit" and they refused to provide significant additional resources for *Children Achieving*.[23] By 1997, the Superintendent, the Board of Education, the City Council, and the Mayor were all looking to the state to solve the District's fiscal problems. They were in agreement that the state was failing to provide a fair share of the costs of educating Philadelphia's students.

THE SCHOOLS

Superintendent Hornbeck inherited a stable, but poorly performing school system. Unlike some other American cities where graft and patronage have made public schooling a disreputable enterprise, the District was seen as honest, but failing. A special section of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published in 1994 — the summer of Hornbeck's arrival — painted a dismal portrait of student achievement in the city's schools. According to the *Inquirer*:

- Over half of the city's public school students were failing to master basic skills. Fifty-one percent failed the state reading test as compared to 13 percent statewide, and 50 percent failed the state math test as compared to 14 percent statewide. Seventy percent of African Americans and 75 percent of Latinos failed one or both parts of the state test.

[18] N. Lemann, "No man's town: The good times are killing off America's local elites." *The New Yorker* (2000, June 5), pp. 22-28.

[19] J. Century, *A citizen's guide to the Philadelphia school budget*. Philadelphia: Greater Philadelphia First, 1998.

[20] School District of Philadelphia, *Realities converge, revisited: School district sees gains on test scores and management efficiencies, but fiscal crisis is at hand*. Philadelphia: Author, 1998, p. 11.

[21] Ibid, p. 29.

[22] Until January 2001, the Mayor was not able to appoint the entire Board when he assumed office, which diluted the accountability of the Board to the Mayor. But in the November 2000 election, Philadelphia citizens voted to change the city charter so that the Mayor would have the authority to appoint all Board members at one time and to remove Board members at his/her discretion.

[23] School District of Philadelphia, *Realities converge, revisited*, p. 11.

- Forty-nine percent of ninth-graders failed to earn promotion to the tenth grade.

- On any given day, one in four students was absent from class, and in the average year, nearly one in four students was suspended from school.[24]

Corporate and civic leaders were disappointed in student performance and disillusioned with local District leadership. Constance Clayton had served as the first African American and first female superintendent from 1980 to 1992. When Clayton assumed the District helm, she faced a system deeply wounded by bitter union strikes and in financial crisis. She made labor peace and financial stability the first order of business in her plan to improve public education, and to her credit, was successful in these areas.

Clayton's education reforms included a Standardized Curriculum that offered an academic scope and sequence for all grades and subject areas. A citywide testing program aligned test items with discrete curriculum objectives and provided schools with a tool to monitor student progress toward achievement goals specified in their School Improvement Plan. Unfortunately, her strategy for improving the academic achievement of students produced disappointing results.

Under Clayton, the private sector increased its investment in public education. Higher education, foundations, and private sector partners created PATHS/PRISM, the precursor to the Philadelphia Education Fund, which aimed to professionalize teaching through professional development activities and mini-grants for classroom teachers. Philadelphia was nationally known for its strong teacher networks, including the Philadelphia Writing Project, the Math Congress, and the Teachers' Learning Cooperative, that had been nurtured by PATHS/PRISM.[25]

In 1986, the Pew Charitable Trusts made a groundbreaking $13 million grant to establish the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative, which aimed to radically restructure Philadelphia's neighborhood high schools. The Collaborative crafted a strategy that restructured large, alienating high schools into campuses of small learning communities. It also pressed the District to pursue new school governance structures, including site-based councils and "experimental status" which allowed exemptions from labor and state regulations in schools in which 75 percent of staff voted to adopt innovations. But both PATHS/PRISM and the Collaborative brushed up against District bureaucracy and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers in the bid to gain autonomy for the new small learning communities. For civic leaders, particularly foundation staff, these contentious public encounters highlighted the system's resistance to change and the barriers to reform posed by the teachers' contract.

Civic elites believed that Clayton had sought their support, but not their input on matters of substance. They were disillusioned with a District administration that was not forthcoming with data on whether students were actually making progress.[26] City and civic leaders seized Clayton's retirement as the moment to influence the direction of Philadelphia public education. They established the Partnership for Public Education, which worked with the Mayor and Board of Education to recruit a superintendent who

[24] "A district in distress," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (1994, October 23).

[25] E. Useem, J. Culbertson, and J. Buchanan, *The contributions of teacher networks to Philadelphia's school reform.* Philadelphia: Philadelphia Education Fund, 1997.

[26] Business leader, October 2000.

would put accountability for results at the center of the District reform agenda. By this time, the Pew Charitable Trusts had assumed a prominent role in the national standards movement and staff there hoped to recruit a leader committed to that brand of reform.

CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

A study of Philadelphia's prospects and challenges commissioned by the Pew Charitable Trusts in the 1990s characterized the city's civic leadership as "disengaged" and as having a "pervasive, defeatist mentality."[27] Despite Mayor Ed Rendell's cheerleading for city improvements, civic institutions and leaders did not develop a "can do" spirit and efforts at rallying together to solve a particular issue were limited. Community development corporations were weak when Superintendent Hornbeck arrived and, while there were a few examples of effective neighborhood and grassroots organizing, they remained isolated and were not directed at public education.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE SCHOOLS

The vulnerability of the city's small economic gains during the 1990s was prominent in our interviews. In response to the question, "What do you view as the three greatest challenges to Philadelphia?", informants almost universally named economic decline and a desperately inadequate public school system. Our respondents saw the state of the schools and the state of the city, especially the city's economy, as tightly linked, but they presented varying views on the lines of causality. Respondents also focused on different consequences of the school system's inadequacies.

All of the people with whom we spoke expressed grave concerns about the city's economic viability. Many implicated the schools in the city's decline. Some blamed schools for the flight of the middle class and the ensuing erosion of the tax base:

Public education is central to improving the city. The issues that we hear about from the neighborhoods are safety and schools. Schools are the biggest reason that people leave the city. Myself included.[28]

The poor quality of education is certainly at the top of my list. And then there are the consequences from that — the loss of an employment base, the high tax structure compared to the suburbs, and the fact that people don't want to stay in the city.[29]

Others criticized schools for churning out students who were not prepared for employment. They saw the school system as responsible for a poorly educated workforce that discouraged corporations from remaining in Philadelphia or choosing to locate here:

I've been involved in trying to get big technology to the city. And it's not happening. The wage tax is not the deciding factor. Workforce preparedness is the biggest concern. And these folks are not looking for high-end employees. These are basic, entry-level jobs. They just want people who will be responsible, stick around, and learn something.[30]

Prospective employers are concerned with the lack of talent in the city.[31]

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[27] Whiting, *Philadelphia: Prospects and challenges at the end of the decade*, p. 22.

[28] Media leader, April 2000.

[29] Civic leader, March 2000.

[30] Media leader, April 2000.

[31] Civic leader, January 2001.

In summary, these interviewees stressed the need to attract and hold businesses if the city was going to establish a viable tax base. From their viewpoint, Philadelphia's economic recovery hinged on the schools' capacity to produce an adequate workforce and attract middle- and working-class families. More and better jobs would encourage middle- and working-class families to live in and contribute to the city's prosperity through their taxes, consumer spending, and housing investments. But the city could compete for these new residents only if there were good public schools for their children.

It is only a small overstatement to say that these interviewees laid Philadelphia's decline at the feet of its school system. Is this a fair analysis? We have already noted the negative impact of high taxes on working- and middle-class residents. In addition, while it is true that many of the middle-class Philadelphia residents recently relocated city cite poor public schools as a factor in their decision to leave, the trend of suburbanization began in the early twentieth century as result of federal housing and highway policies, discriminatory bank lending for housing, and flight from the influx of poor immigrants.[32] Further, it is impossible to talk about suburbanization without situating it within a history of race relations in the U.S. At times explicitly, and always implicitly, the suburbs have been identified as a place for White families.

Grassroots civic leaders and School Board members painted a more complex picture of the relationship between public schools and the city economy. They saw the two in a cruel and mutually reinforcing dynamic. Often they focused on the city's existing residents and the lack of economic opportunities for them:

We're in a vicious cycle. We have a declining tax base, so the city is less able to provide the services people expect, so people leave. And then you have the neediest people remaining in the city. So the challenge is restoring opportunity for people to earn a living, raise a family with the expectation that the next generation will do better. We need a stronger economy and that is tied to the education system.[33]

Some leaders were angry that schools bore the blame for deep-seated social ills and resented what they perceived as unrealistic expectations for public education:

[Public education] has become the flash point for societal concerns like race and class. We think we just need to come up with the right education plan and then we can make public education [and society] work. This is simplistic.[34]

Clearly, Philadelphia's leaders offered contrasting ideas about what it would take to strengthen the city and what the public could expect schools to do in that effort. Their varying analyses of urban problems and the role of public education foreshadowed the different criteria by which they would judge any educational reform. Some judged reform on its ability to hold middle-class families with school-age children in the city; others judged the system's ability to positively impact the life chances of those it has consistently failed — poor children of color.

[32] K. Jackson, *Crabgrass frontier: The suburbanization of the United States.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. In his analysis of federal housing policies over the past century, Jackson asserts that federal housing policies, the development of the modern transportation system, and the relocation of major corporate centers from urban to suburban areas have been the real culprits. He concludes that the basic direction of federal policies toward housing has been concentration of the poor in the central city and the dispersal of the affluent to the suburbs.

[33] School Board member, March 2000.

[34] Civic leader, May 2000.

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POWERFUL MESSAGES WITH MANY INTERPRETATIONS

Superintendent David Hornbeck's plan for improving Philadelphia's schools, *Children Achieving*, was a reform agenda with powerful ideas, ambitious goals, and broad scope. Hornbeck had strong beliefs about what public schools could and should do. He was passionate in his assertions that: "Results matter. It's not enough to work hard," "All children can achieve at high levels," and "Adults' expectations of students have been too low and this has contributed to the consistently low achievement levels in our schools."[35] Hornbeck pledged that every student would achieve proficiency in three core subject areas (math, reading, and science) by 2008. In laying out his plan, the new superintendent argued that previous attempts at reforms had failed because they were too incremental, too narrowly framed, and did not attempt to alter the "system" itself. He believed that a more comprehensive strategy was necessary — one that changed all parts of the system all at once. Superintendent Hornbeck identified 10 reform components which were necessary in order for Philadelphia schools to meet the new ambitious student performance goals (see Sidebar 2 on page 18). Hornbeck's message was powerful and resonated with a community eager for change.

The language describing the reform components, however, was abstract and laden with educational terms unfamiliar to most people and open to many interpretations. The critical levers for change in *Children Achieving* were standards, accountability, and decentralization. Based on the *Children Achieving* Action Design, District leaders began restructuring the system in line with the major ideas of the reform. Educators and parents, and community members developed content standards to guide curriculum and instruction by establishing what students should know and be able to do. Central administrators set targets for schools and monitored their students' progress on indicators such as standardized test scores, attendance, and promotion and graduation rates which comprised the District's Performance Responsibility Index (PRI). The District offered rewards and sanctions to school staffs based on their schools' progress toward meeting their targets. The District was divided into 22 neighborhood clusters, each serving a comprehensive high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools. Cluster offices were established to offer guidance and support to their schools. In turn, schools were reorganized into small learning communities composed of 250-400 students and their teachers. Small learning communities were designed to offer more personalized teaching and learning environments and to customize curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of their students. Schools were encouraged to create local school councils of teachers, parents, and administrators to set school policies.

The District established a system of supports to help schools meet their performance targets. These included: clusters, as described above; the Curriculum Frameworks, to give more guidance to teachers in how to implement the new standards; the Teaching and Learning Network, to provide direct support (i.e., professional development, advice on how to implement new District policies) to schools and teachers; and the Family Resource Network, to coordinate the many "safety net" human services supports that so many poor children need.

[35] Excerpts from speeches by the Superintendent.

SIDEBAR 2. THE CHILDREN ACHIEVING 10-POINT ACTION DESIGN

In 1995, the District released the *Children Achieving* Action Design in which it articulated 10 reform components necessary to achieve its goals. The following are excerpts from District documents and the Superintendent's speeches that enumerate these 10 components:

- We must behave as if we believe that all students will learn at high levels.
- Standards-based reform will drive the system...We must set standards, have new assessment strategies, and develop new incentive systems for both adults and students.
- Decisions will be made at the school level...Authority for decisions about personnel, budget, professional development, instructional strategies and curriculum, scheduling, student and teacher assignments inside of a school, and, perhaps, discipline, should be made at the school level...In addition to school employees, parents must also be partners in making those decisions.
- Staff development is critical to improved performance.
- Early childhood support is less expensive and more effective...There are at least three areas of focus important to school readiness: supports for families; health and social services; and full-day kindergarten, pre-kindergarten, and childcare.
- Community services and supports can make the difference between success and failure. Children who are unhealthy, hungry, abused, ill-housed, ill-clothed, or otherwise face the kinds of problems outside of the school borne of poverty cannot achieve at high levels.
- Adequate technology, instructional materials, and facilities are necessary to learning.
- Strong public engagement is required. Unless parents, civic leaders, elected officials, the business community, postsecondary educators, and the wider citizenry understand and support radical change, we cannot sustain it.
- We must have adequate resources and use them effectively.
- We must do all of these nine components. The agenda is not a pick-and-choose menu. We must approach the challenge of education reform in a comprehensive and integrated way. If one or more features of the whole agenda is not implemented, its power to yield high performance by all students will be significantly diminished.[36]

THE *CHILDREN ACHIEVING* PLAN: "COMPREHENSIVE" AND "COMMON SENSE"

When our informants discussed *Children Achieving*, it was not in terms of specific initiatives or components such as clusters, small learning communities, or the new standardized assessments, but in terms of its broad approach to educational improvement. Interviewees, whether from business, government, civic institutions, grassroots groups, higher education, or the

[36] School District of Philadelphia, *Children Achieving strategic action design.*

media, portrayed the plan as "comprehensive" and "complex." They often recited Hornbeck's admonition that "it was not a pick-and-choose agenda" and that changes must occur throughout the system all at once. And perhaps most tellingly, they explained that *Children Achieving* was "common sense."

It's a complex agenda built on simple ideas about schools. The premise is that you can't do just one, two, three things — you need to do it all.[37]

Children Achieving was a logical document.[38]

Children Achieving is a lot of common sense ideas — it's not some new brilliant program.[39]

Educators have been trying to do the things that Children Achieving talks about for years.[40]

Our participants lauded *Children Achieving* for its logic. And they noted that its ideas were not new. However, as we will show, this broad view of *Children Achieving* masked significant differences in understanding of the reforms.

Of all the sectors included in our sample, leaders of civic institutions offered the most praise for the *Children Achieving* reform plan. They expressed pride and gratitude that Philadelphia had a plan — something they saw that other cities lacked.

David did Philadelphia the favor of showing up with a concerted agenda that established the idea that children can achieve.[41]

When I look at other urban school districts, I see that in many ways we're lucky. We have a strong reform plan.[42]

We have something to build on, but we have to remember that it takes a long time. What's positive is the amount of work being done, the focus on high expectations and changing practice, professional development, and involving the community in schools.[43]

Civic leaders saw the plan as a foundation on which to build, the strongest legacy of the *Children Achieving* era.

Accountability was the most frequently mentioned characteristic of the reform by participants across all sectors. For the majority of our participants, the accountability system was not only the clearest aspect of the reform, it was also the most important — the driver of everything else. A few, such as the business leader below, considered accountability the reform itself and criticized Hornbeck for complicating a straightforward message and losing the focus necessary to achieve results.

Children Achieving was all about accountability. He [Hornbeck] made it complicated with the 10 points. He could have made it much more simple by focusing on the accountability piece. The loss of that was the loss of the message.[44]

The second most often-mentioned characteristic of *Children Achieving* was its emphasis on the idea that all children can

[37] Foundation leader, October 2000.

[38] Civic leader, August 2000.

[39] Former School Board member, October 2000.

[40] School District staff member, May 2000.

[41] Government leader, March 2000.

[42] Civic leader, February 2000.

[43] Civic leader, March 2000.

[44] Business leader, November 2000.

achieve and participants linked this idea closely to Hornbeck as an individual.

The best thing that David did was convincing people that every child can actually learn.[45]

[Children Achieving's goal] has been to change the mindset about what we can do to make sure kids learn. The basic tenet is that all children can learn and I think he's [Hornbeck] so right about that.[46]

Although the vast majority of the people we talked to commended the ideas of the reform plan, there were a few exceptions. These participants argued that while the rhetoric of *Children Achieving* was seductive, the plan was unrealistic. A labor leader argued that it did not address the realities of schools, particularly schools' lack of resources for meeting the many needs of poor urban students:

How can you argue against Children Achieving? You can't. It's like Bambi. But you have to look at the reality.[47]

A government leader who supported school choice as a solution to the problems of the schools said:

Children Achieving does not have meaning to the customer. What is Children Achieving? Is it reading, writing, and math? Children Achieving is a phrase to use as an organizing tool for marketing. It's a feel-good-about-the-system ploy.[48]

On the surface, almost all of our interviewees accepted *Children Achieving*'s major premises. However this apparent unity of belief was deceptive. When we probed their views of *Children Achieving* more deeply, it became apparent that there were competing understandings of the major ideas underlying the reform — particularly standards, accountability, and decentralization.

MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS OF *CHILDREN ACHIEVING*

A theory of action is the set of assumptions and beliefs that reform leaders hold about how their efforts that will work together to cause desired improvements. We have described *Children Achieving*'s theory of action as follows:

If the central administration works with the schools and the community to set high academic standards for student achievement; aligns assessment with those standards; establishes an accountability system that offers strong incentives; delegates more authority over school resources, organization, policies, and programs to the schools; monitors equity throughout the organization; and builds public understanding and support for reform; and if central administration and cluster staff provide guidance and high-quality support to schools and small learning communities, then the teachers and administrators of the Philadelphia schools, in consultation with their communities, will customize instructional technologies and patterns of behavior that will help all children reach high standards.[49]

Did Philadelphia's leaders subscribe to this theory of action? Did they understand it? No matter how strong the educational improvement plan or how visionary the district leadership, there must be sustained

[45] Civic leader, August 2000.

[46] Foundation leader, January 2000.

[47] Labor leader, August 2000.

[48] Government leader, October 2000.

[49] Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Research for Action, and the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, *A first-year evaluation report of Children Achieving: Philadelphia's education reform*. Philadelphia: Greater Philadelphia First, 1996.

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support from civic elites and ordinary citizens in order for reform strategies to take hold and spread in urban schools. In addition to educational bureaucracy and human resistance to change, contentious politics and scarce resources have consistently undermined full implementation of reform ideas and plans.[50] Coalitions of support and institutional alliances are necessary. What does it take to create such coalitions and partnerships?

In their analysis of the Chicago reform, Shipps, Sconzert, and Swyers argue that reform leaders must understand the perspectives of local constituencies so that their reforms will gain legitimacy in the community. Such understanding helps reform leaders craft approaches to improvement or theories of action that make sense to local stakeholders.[51] It also helps reform leaders anticipate when they will need to compromise in order to gain broader support and build ownership. Like Hill, Campbell, and Harvey,[52] Shipps, Sconzert, and Swyers also argue that reform approaches need to be flexible. In their view, no one strategy is likely to transform schools and improve student learning by itself. "Hybrid" reforms are more promising. They are also more likely to appeal to wide range of constituencies, especially if they emerge from ongoing discussions of reform ideas and revisions to original plans when necessary.

Lingard and his colleagues offer another perspective on reform strategies. They point out that too often reforms are discarded without an understanding of what ideas actually succeeded or failed. They argue that any single theory of improvement often contains competing concepts that are lost in the often-abstract language of school reform.[53] They show how particular reform ideas, in their case, "school-based management," far from being a consistently understood and unified theory of change, are often politically contested and have competing meanings. Recent research on the standards movement in the United States has supported this.[54] It has pointed to the varying interpretations of "standards" and the very different implications that each of these interpretations carries for such educational practices as assessment of student learning (standardized tests versus performance-based assessment) and pedagogy (scripted lessons that develop students' basic skills versus constructivist teaching and learning that values inquiry and meaning making).

In the following discussion, we show that there were competing interpretations of the ideas underlying *Children Achieving*. Our interviewees read the abstract ideas of standards, accountability, and decentralization through the lens of their own theories of how to improve public education. In other words, they heard what they wanted and expected to hear from the perspective of their personal theories about what actions would improve public education.

We asked leaders what they perceived to be the successes and failures of the reform, what they thought ought to be continued, and what changes they believed were

[50] K.A. McDermott, "Barriers to large-scale success of models for urban school reform." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 22 (2000), pp. 83-89.

[51] D. Shipps, K. Sconzert, and H. Swyers, *The Chicago Annenberg Challenge: The first three years*. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1999.

[52] Hill, Campbell, and Harvey, *It takes a city*.

[53] B. Lingard, D. Hayes, and M. Mills, "Developments in school-based management: The specific case of Queensland, Australia." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 2000.

[54] S. Thompson, "The authentic standards movement and its evil twin." *Phi Delta Kappan*, *82*(5), pp. 358-362.

necessary to improve schools and student achievement in the future. From their responses, we discerned five theories of action which we have named: managerial, redistribution of resources, democratic revitalization, teaching and learning, and market.[55] It should be noted that few participants spoke from only one theory of action. Most drew from multiple theories of action in their articulations of the problems facing schools and what needed to be done; sometimes there were contradictory theories operating at the same time in their accounts.

There were, however, some broad patterns of similarity among participants within sectors. Business and political leaders focused on the need for a strong managerial model. Some combined this with a market approach, describing school choice as the most logical and powerful solution to a poorly performing school system. Grassroots leaders and civic leaders, *Children Achieving* Challenge staff, and District employees saw economic inequality and racial discrimination as the most significant issues confronting schools (and the broader society). They called for a redistribution of resources that would provide students from groups who have traditionally performed poorly with the better-designed and more intensive supports needed to ensure their school success. Grassroots, civic, and foundation leaders were also likely to call for increased public engagement, thereby voicing the values of democratic revitalization. Higher education, civic, and foundation leaders focused on teaching and learning as the pathway to improving student performance.

Below we examine these five theories of action. We describe how each theory framed the major problems of the city's schools and the solutions it offered to those problems. We also identify the interpretations each theory offered for the important ideas of *Children Achieving* — standards, accountability, and decentralization.

MANAGERIAL

Participants from the business and government sectors were most likely to view *Children Achieving* from a managerial perspective. From this perspective, low student achievement is seen as the result of weak efforts by adults and students. Managerialists advocate for outcomes-based reforms and a system of incentives and sanctions to encourage school staff and students to ratchet up their performance. The role of central administrators is to set clear performance targets and then give school-level administrators the authority to decide how to meet those targets. The purpose of decentralization is to give discretion to school staff so that professional autonomy is commensurate with accountability. So, for example, the managerial approach would not use decentralization as a means to increase the role of parents in school decision-making, but as a means to increase the responsibility of school staff to solve students' educational problems. What is important are clear accountability targets, therefore standards need to be precise. In this theory of action, there is little concern that standardized tests will narrow curriculum and instruction.

Those of our participants who spoke from this theory of action often wanted District leaders to be political pragmatists who "could get the job done;" they wanted principals to have authority to hire staff and more discretion over teachers' time; they wanted the teachers' union to make

[55] Some of these theories are drawn from the work of Shipps, Sconzert, and Swyers (see footnote 51), and Lingard, Hayes, and Mills (see footnote 53).

TABLE 1. COMPETING THEORIES OF ACTION

Theory of Action	Problem Definition	Action Plan	Purpose of Standards	Lines of Accountability	Roles in a Decentralized System
Systemic Reform (Hornbeck) Guidance for educational improvement from a distance through alignment of policies, resources, and incentives.	Lack of alignment of policies has created fragmentation and incoherence. Lack of accountability for performance.	Establish standards, monitor progress, and offer incentives for performance. Align policies and resources. Build capacity through professional development.	Standards are important because they offer direction for aligning curriculum, assessment, allocation of resources, and professional development.	Lines for accountability follow district organizational chart. Public reporting of data on schools' progress toward performance targets also makes educators accountable to community stakeholders.	Central office sets targets for schools, monitors students' progress, and offers rewards or sanctions to frontline educators based on performance. Authority for decisions about personnel, budget, instructional strategies, and curriculum belong to schools.
Managerial (Business and government leaders) Frontline managers are accountable for student performance with concomitant discretion over decision-making.	Lack of accountability for results. Centralized bureaucracy and teacher contract are impediments to frontline managers (principals).	Set clear targets for performance and hold everyone accountable for results. Give frontline managers more discretion over work rules, resources, etc. Build capacity of frontline managers.	Standards are important because they offer clear targets for performance and are the basis for a system of rewards and sanctions. With clear targets, educators and students will ratchet up their performance.	Lines for accountability follow the district organizational chart; employees are responsible to their supervisor.	Central administration sets clear targets for performance. Frontline managers have broad discretion for hiring staff, allocating resources, and customizing the educational program to fit local context.
Redistribution of Resources (Grassroots leaders, *Children Achieving* Challenge staff, and District employees) Reallocate resources so that students who have traditionally performed poorly receive the supports they need to meet rigorous standards.	Economic and racial inequality. Insufficient resources devoted to support all students in reaching rigorous standards.	Generate public discussion about root causes of inequality and build consensus about strategies for addressing them. Mobilize resources from federal, state, and city governments, and private sources.	Standards are important because they leverage socially equitable student outcomes. All students, regardless of their race, class, and gender, will have access to a rigorous curriculum and the supports necessary to meet new requirements.	Lines for accountability follow the district organizational chart. When combined with democratic revitalization, community stakeholders play an important role in accountability.	Central office sets standards and monitors performance. Authority for decisions about educational program can be made at any level, but the central office must play a vigilant role in monitoring the equitable distribution of resources. When combined with democratic revitalization, community stakeholders play an important role in monitoring equity.

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TABLE 1. COMPETING THEORIES OF ACTION (CONTINUED)

Theory of Action	Problem Definition	Action Plan	Purpose of Standards	Lines of Accountability	Roles in a Decentralized System
Democratic Revitalization (Civic, foundation, and grassroots leaders) Reform plan emerges from a broad public dialogue about purposes of education.	Schools controlled by educational bureaucracy that is resistant to input of parents and community members. Lack of a broad public dialogue on the purposes of schools.	Promote public dialogue about purposes of education. Make information about schools readily accessible to public and create many avenues for civic engagement in schools. Make local school councils authentic sites for community participation in decisions.	Standards are important because they offer the opportunity for community stakeholders to articulate what they want their students to learn.	Educators are accountable to their community stakeholders.	Local community members play the key role in hiring school management, setting local school policy and monitoring outcomes.
Teaching and Learning (Higher education, foundation, and civic leaders) Invigorate curriculum and instruction to emphasize critical thinking. Invest in professional development for educators.	Insufficient attention to curriculum and instruction, the development of school leaders, and the ongoing learning of teachers.	Invest in professional development for principals, teachers, and support personnel. Seek out and/or develop high-quality, rigorous curriculum. Provide many support services for students who need help reaching high standards.	Standards are important because they offer a framework for curriculum development and imply an instructional approach.	Educators are accountable to their colleagues for continuing to grow professionally, participating in school decision-making, and for student learning.	School staff who share a common mission and pedagogical approach customize an educational program for their students.
Market (Business and government leaders) Place schools under market conditions so that parents can choose the best school for their children.	System lacks choice, competition, and entrepreneurship.	Create many educational options and give parents the resources to choose what is appropriate for their children.	Parents use their own standards to select schools for their children.	Parents hold schools accountable through choice.	Educators (program developers, vendors) select the educational model for their schools. The degree of parent involvement in this process depends on the model.

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concessions to management about the role of seniority in job assignments and about work conditions in exchange for increases in compensation. One of our interviewees crystallized the managerial theory of action. Some of his comments included:

Children Achieving was all about accountability.

He [the Superintendent] was a missionary in the way he was so fervent in his approach. You have to be practical to get things done sometimes.

The [teachers'] contract is a big burden. It's all the work rules, the crazy work rules.[56]

REDISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

Grassroots civic leaders, *Children Achieving* Challenge staff, and District employees were advocates for redistributing resources. In this theory of action, the problem of low student achievement in urban schools is the result of social injustice. Schools reflect the inequities of the broader society and reproduce them. Taken-for-granted practices, such as ability tracking, staff transfer, and seniority policies that assign the least-experienced and least-qualified staff to schools with the highest concentrations of families in poverty, are unfair. Increased resources distributed according to need are key to assuring equitable outcomes.

The redistributing resources discourse about standards emphasizes the development of high expectations as a necessary precursor to achieving equitable student outcomes. The assumption is that differences in academic performance correlate with race and class because of adults' beliefs that poor students and students of color cannot achieve at high levels. Changing adult expectations is critical to improving student performance. If teachers believe that students can achieve at high levels, then they will teach an enriched and rigorous curriculum to all students, regardless of their race, class, and gender.

Those advocating for a redistribution of resources call for a broad discussion about the reasons for inequities and the building of an advocacy base to correct them. This view overlaps with the Democratic Revitalization theory of action which also calls for broad public discussion about public education.

Disaggregated data that reports outcomes for students by race/ethnicity, economic status, etc. is key to this theory of action. Credible information about all students' learning is essential to decisions about how to allocate and direct supports to students who are not meeting standards. During *Children Achieving,* new ways of reporting student data brought attention to educational inequities and the District conducted a number of policy studies that focused on questions of equity. Proponents of this theory of action argue that any decentralization initiatives must be accompanied by vigilant monitoring of equity. During *Children Achieving,* reform leaders reflected that belief by pulling back from their initial decentralization of authority measures as they reviewed evidence that reforms were not closing the achievement gap between racial groups.[57]

A civic leader articulated this theory of action:

I really credit Children Achieving with putting the notion on the table that these kids should have a really good school system. I think being persistent about the

[56] Business leader, November 2000.

[57] E. Foley, *Contradictions and control in systemic reform: The ascendancy of the central office in Philadelphia schools.* Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania, 2001.

idea is good. We shouldn't have a double standard for suburban and urban kids. Hornbeck has mounted a serious meaningful effort to improve the schools here. Before it was always less than great. The mentality was "we can't do that here." It's been that way for as long as I've been around. Not building the support for the program is problematic. I think he has tried, but he could have done more. But then I don't think the business community or the PFT [Philadelphia Federation of Teachers] tried to help either. This has been a more serious attempt to get Philly schools to achieve at the same level as suburban schools. The attitude isn't "let's do the best we can given the poor material we have to work with," but let's do it fairly for everyone and gradually over the long term.[58]

Those who advocated for a redistribution of resources were more concerned that Philadelphia's public schools better serve students of color and interrupt the cycle of poverty and disadvantage than that they strengthen the market economy, satisfy corporate desires for an educated workforce, or provide islands of educational excellence for middle-class families.

Superintendent Hornbeck's very public and persistent fight for fair funding marked him, more than any other city figure, as a leader of the struggle for social justice in education. He remained a hero to many grassroots leaders and parents we interviewed, even as support for him crumbled in other sectors.

DEMOCRATIC REVITALIZATION

Leaders from civic institutions, grassroots groups, and foundations were represented in this category. Proponents of democratic revitalization view centralized bureaucracy as the obstacle to educational renewal. They argue for a broad public dialogue on the purposes of education that would serve as the foundation for a covenant between a community and its schools. The articulation of standards for students' learning is part of the public discussion and lays the groundwork for accountability of schools to the community. The purpose of decentralization is to increase parental/community authority in local school councils. Participants speaking from this perspective critiqued *Children Achieving*'s failure to "change power relationships" and to "create a public clamor for change."

The problem is that we made some structural changes but we did not change the power or authority relationships in schools and between school people and the community.[59]

My main criticism about Children Achieving is that you can't do this kind of reform without more widespread support. There needs to be a demand for it. There are other parents and community leaders who could support the agenda more strongly, but I don't think the District tried to engage those people and it cost them in the end. You can't have a large program like this without good salesmanship. I think that's the crucial missing piece of this agenda. You can't just come up with some good ideas and then have quiet conversations with your 10 closest friends and expect things to change radically. It's not enough. You need to create a public clamor for change. That just hasn't happened. I don't think the public ever understood much about Children Achieving. I think if they understood it, they would support it.[60]

Public reporting of data redefines the relationship between the District and the

[58] Civic leader, April 2000.

[59] Civic leader, March 2000.

[60] Civic leader, April 2000.

community and encourages greater public engagement in school reform. From this perspective, a major accomplishment of *Children Achieving* was making data available for public scrutiny. The weak implementation of local school councils and lack of support for their authority was a major disappointment. Often the civic leaders calling for democratic revitalization also viewed inequities in the educational system as the root of many of its problems.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Higher education leaders, civic leaders, and foundation staff were proponents of the teaching and learning theory of action. Supporters of this theory of action focus on the ongoing learning of educational practitioners, the professionalization of the teaching force, and the implementation of educational innovations such as whole-school reform models as the means of change. Fullan has been a strong advocate for this theory of action. He argues that "changes at the bottom" are as necessary for systemic change as policy alignment at the top. He suggests two bottom-up strategies. One is the large-scale networking of schools with outside partners who can bring high-quality professional development and other resources to bear on the challenges of schools. And the second is a reculturing of schools so that the ongoing learning of practitioners and continuous improvement of practice are the underpinnings of school reform.[61]

Those working from this theory of action look to standards to offer teachers guidance about what should be taught and how. At the same time, decentralization should offer school educators discretion over decisions about curriculum and instruction because they are the professionals and they have the most knowledge about their students' needs, interests, and abilities. This theory of action emphasizes non-hierarchical accountability. Strong collegial relationships among teachers promote a culture of collective responsibility for student achievement.

Developing an infrastructure of expertise and support outside the District (higher education institutions, community and cultural organizations) that can work with school staff to improve teaching and learning is also an important component. From the vantage point of teaching and learning as a theory of action, full-day kindergarten and *Children Achieving's* attention to increasing opportunities for professional development were major accomplishments. Some of the interviewees who supported this theory of action expressed disappointment that, despite reform leaders' intentions, it had proved extremely difficult for *Children Achieving* to reach classrooms.

We're not talking about the classrooms. That is the hardest. The biggest disappointment is that we're not paying attention to teachers in the classroom. We just do peripheral things. . .[62]

Others believed that the reform plan was weak in its mechanisms for developing school leadership and bemoaned the District's lack of investment in its frontline educators.

David didn't pay any attention to the leadership skills of principals. Imagine what could have happened if we had focused on leadership development.[63]

MARKET

The market-based theory of action asserts that schools will improve only if they are placed under market conditions, in which

[61] M. Fullan, "Turning systemic thinking on its head," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(6), pp. 420-423.

[62] Civic leader, March 2000.

[63] Civic leader, October 2000.

SIDEBAR 3. SCHOOL CHOICE AS A THEORY OF CHANGE: GOVERNOR RIDGE'S EDUCATION REFORM PROPOSALS

Governor Tom Ridge's education policy agenda differed radically from *Children Achieving*'s systemic reform approach. The theory of change underlying his reform proposals was that schools would only improve if they were placed under market conditions, in which parents were consumers and could choose what they considered to be the best school for their children. The exercise of choice would force ineffective schools out of business as parents moved their children to schools that were successful. Throughout his administration, Governor Ridge advocated the creation of charter schools, the institution of vouchers, and the privatization of school systems that were experiencing chronic and widespread failure as remedies to overcome entrenched bureaucracy and improve performances.

Five months after taking office, Ridge proposed a statewide voucher plan, called, "Keystone Initiative for a Difference in Our Schools," designed to provide "educational opportunity grants" to families throughout Pennsylvania. The opportunity grants, or vouchers, could be used at private, religious, or out-of-district public schools. They would initially go to families making $15,000 or less a year and eventually to families making $70,000 or less. If the plan had been adopted, 52,000 students would have been eligible in the first year, more than half of them residing in Philadelphia. Shortly after its introduction, the bill was rejected in the House by seven votes.

Ridge's second effort to promote vouchers was in spring of 1999. He introduced another statewide plan, called the Academic Recovery Act, designed to provide "super-vouchers" to students in the most academically troubled school districts. He wrote $63 million into the state budget to pay for a statewide pilot program, only to find that he again did not have the support needed from the legislature to start the program.

In spring 2001, Ridge finally succeeded in passing an education plan that included bills that many observers considered a backdoor to vouchers. The plan exchanged an increase in teacher pensions for a package of education bills that provided grants to parents for after-school tutoring if their children are failing state tests. And perhaps most controversially, the bill allows state tax credits of up to 90 percent to corporations for donations to groups financing scholarships to private schools or public schools outside of students' home districts. These two provisions of the package were unique nationally. Another aspect of the package that supported privatization efforts was a bill that allowed school districts to create "independent schools" that were similar to charter schools, but did not have to start from scratch.

parents are consumers and can choose what they consider to be the best schools for their children. This theory assumes that if people have a choice, they will leave schools that aren't working and those schools will have to improve or "go out of business." Vouchers, charter schools, privatization of schools, and outsourcing of district services are among the most prominent mechanisms of reform for advocates of this theory of action. (See Sidebar 3 about Governor Ridge.)
In Philadelphia, the market theory of action was discussed as a strategy for attracting and keeping middle- and working-class families in the city.

The way I see it, it's a way to keep the Catholic school system alive and well. If those schools crumble, then the city crumbles, and those schools deserve

support. Besides that, the poor single mother should have the same rights as you and I. She should have the same right to choose.[44]

People aren't using the schools. They're going to charter schools or people are leaving the city. It's all about market conditions. If people have a choice, they don't choose the public schools.[45]

DISCUSSION

Children Achieving was an ambitious reform plan held together by a set of powerful ideas about how to improve student performance. But as we have demonstrated in this section, the abstract and ambiguous rhetoric surrounding systemic reform was open to many interpretations. People understood standards, decentralization, and accountability from their own frame of reference. These differences in interpretation were masked by the plan's appeal to logic and common sense, and its complexity and comprehensiveness.

How did differences in interpretation play out? When did they surface? One example was around the District's decentralization plans. As originally articulated, *Children Achieving* aimed to put decisions about curriculum and instruction in the hands of frontline practitioners and, at the same time, to engage parents in school policy decisions through local school councils. Business leaders, the Commonwealth Association of School Administrators (the school administrators' bargaining unit), and others working from a managerial perspective heard the emphasis on school-level decision-making as a means of giving greater control and autonomy to school principals. But grassroots community groups like the Alliance Organizing Project (AOP) focused on local school councils as sites for democratic decision-making that involved parents as substantive partners in shaping school policy (democratic revitalization). The AOP was funded by the *Children Achieving* Challenge to train parents to be leaders in their schools, advocates for their children, and supporters for the overall reform effort. Often school staff, especially principals, were threatened by the new role for parents and disgruntled by parents who were sometimes vocal in their critique of school practices. When school principals complained that the AOP's work with parents in their schools was undermining administrative authority, business leaders at Greater Philadelphia First were inclined to reduce AOP's funding. While they ultimately decided to continue to support AOP financially, the organizing group was barred from working in any school where the principal was not open to the idea. Our research indicated that there were never broad discussions of these competing philosophies of decentralization. Instead, feelings of betrayal festered.

Likewise, although almost all of our interviewees lauded the Superintendent's insistence that "all children can achieve," this belief had different implications depending on perspective. For managerialists, particularly business leaders, it provided an ethical justification for the accountability system: If we believe that all children can achieve at high levels, holding the adults who teach them responsible for their learning is the right thing to do. They were less likely to heed the message of redistribution of resources intended by the Superintendent. One event put the difference in high relief. On the night Hornbeck proposed to the Board of Education that it remove admissions criteria for special programs and schools so that they would be accessible to a wider range of students, Mayor Rendell made a rare appearance at the Board's meeting. He successfully urged School Board

[44] Business leader, November 2000.

[45] Government leader, October 2000.

members to leave the criteria in place. He argued that dismantling these programs would further increase the tide of middle-class parents leaving the city in search of strong academic programs. The Board voted to leave the criteria in place.

Different perspectives on what it would take to improve public education remained undiscussed for other reasons. One was the close association of the reform's ideas with Hornbeck and people's perception that he would breach no disagreement. As we will see in the next section of this report, the larger political and economic context of inadequate resources also played a significant role in discouraging open dialogue about differences. As District leaders struggled to make the case for fairer funding, civic leaders, especially, were reluctant to voice dissent about the plan. They feared giving ammunition to political leaders who wanted to discredit the reform and the Superintendent.

Even remembering that our interviews occurred before the state took the last steps toward takeover, we were surprised by how little we heard about the market theory of action despite its prominence as a priority of then-Governor Ridge. Our participants framed the struggle between state and city leaders as a debate about the costs of adequately financing the city's schools and the state's responsibility in that funding. They focused on the state's failure to institute more equitable school funding policies and Hornbeck's confrontational style which they saw as an inappropriate strategy for securing public support and state cooperation. Only rarely did an interviewee discuss the different approaches to improving public education offered by the Superintendent and the Governor.

Several of our interviewees noted that it was very difficult to raise questions about the plan or mount an argument or offer another perspective in the face of the compelling logic of "We must change all levels of the system at once." One civic leader crystallized this problem:

The completeness of his [Hornbeck's] vision wasn't amenable to questioning. You couldn't tamper with any part of it.[66]

The Superintendent's posture of "You're either for me or against me" compounded this dilemma, as did the increasing centralization of decision-making. As we will detail in the next section of this report, important decisions and the discussions and debates leading to them were located in a handful of people and were therefore invisible to frontline educators, parents, the general public, and central office administrators not part of the inner circle.

The moral dimensions of the reform's message and their close association with Hornbeck were barriers to principled discussions of important values, beliefs, and ideas underlying the reform. Hornbeck's ownership of the reform and the reform's dependence on him as its leader and visionary permeated the interviews.

Some participants saw this as problematic. A business leader said that the Superintendent's centrality distracted attention from the plan and its ideas.

Anytime you find someone as messianic as David, it's hard not to concentrate on him instead of the agenda.[67]

And a grassroots leader worried that Hornbeck's ideology might be a barrier to coalition building.

Children Achieving is a package deal, and he's a zealot, and he's on a crusade. I knew

[66] Civic leader, March 2000.

[67] Business leader, October 2000.

from the first meeting that it was going to be a tense next few years.[68]

These and other participants believed that the close association of the reform plan with the Superintendent was in conflict with building broad ownership of *Children Achieving*. The centrality of the Superintendent and his beliefs posed an obstacle to the difficult conversations necessary to building deep understanding of, and investment in, the reform's ideas.

Few interviewees delved beneath the rhetoric of "All students can achieve" to explore the meaning and implications for curriculum and instruction, funding, and public engagement that District leaders had intended. In her discussion of *Children Achieving's* legacy, one District leader identified two beliefs central to the reform commonly overlooked by civic leaders.

Some of the important things that have been a part of Children Achieving are the focus on rigorous standards, and rigorous standards for all children. It may take differentiated instruction and different amounts of time for children to reach those standards, but we can't start with an assumption that there are different standards for different children.[69]

The first assumption contained in her statement — that there should be high standards for all — was familiar to and embraced by most of the people we interviewed. The second assumption — that there may need to be different instructional approaches, different levels of resources, different amounts of time in order for all students to meet the standards — was rarely mentioned by interviewees. One business leader explained why he thought people did not talk about the implications of "All students can achieve:"

David said it, but no one heard it. David said that the issue of public education is not about time, it's about commitment. He said that all children can achieve at high levels if we really commit to them and don't just give them a certain amount of time in the classroom. There was a philosophical question here: How high of a level does he mean? That confused a lot of people...

Historically, the only thing American public education has set out to do was to have students spend a certain amount of time in school. It has not been about commitment to their learning. David's idea of commitment could have a powerful impact, but we haven't decided to do it.[70]

In summary, what appeared to be *Children Achieving's* greatest strengths — the power of its ideas, the coherence of its plan, and the passion and commitment of its leadership — also posed obstacles to broad discussion of competing ideas and strategies. It is through such discussions that citizens are able to explore ideas, and that leaders are able to hear concerns and either offer retorts or revise their plans. Such discussions help leaders put aside their own private theories of action to build public consensus around a community theory. *Children Achieving* never became a shared community theory, but remained the theory of a charismatic leader that was perceived differently by different civic leaders. Without broad public discussions and consensus on the strategy, there is scant likelihood for deep public investment in a reform's success.

[68] Civic leader, April 2000.

[69] Philadelphia Education Fund, *Philadelphia public school notebook*. Philadelphia: Author, 2001.

[70] Business leader, October 2000.

CHILDREN ACHIEVING: A CALCULATED RISK

Broad-based involvement of a city's institutions and citizenry is necessary for sustainable improvement of urban schools.[71] Clarence Stone analyzed school reform in several cities and identified "civic capacity" as an important predictor of reform efficacy and staying power. He defined the term:

Civic capacity concerns the extent to which different sectors of the community — business, parents, educators, state and local officeholders, non-profits, and others — act in concert around a matter of community-wide import. It involves mobilization, that is bringing different sectors together, but also developing a shared plan of action...To be lasting, civic capacity needs an institutional foundation for interaction among elites and a "grassroots" base through which ordinary citizens are engaged...[72]

Civic elites and ordinary citizens can press for more radical improvement strategies than district insiders and special interest groups who are likely to cling to traditional approaches to reform, organization, and labor practices.[73] They can offer the institutional memory necessary for policy coherence as educational professionals come and go. They can sustain improvement efforts by monitoring reform's progress and holding political and education leaders accountable for following through on their commitments. They can serve as watchdogs and witnesses for those whose interests are often ignored — poor students of color and students with disabilities.

But the various stakeholders — educators and their unions, business elites, city and state government officials (especially state legislators who control education budgets), civic education groups, grassroots-organizing groups, parents and their organizations, and foundations — bring different and competing interests to their involvement in urban public education. Gittell argues that:

The determination of any effort to achieve school reform is affected by which stakeholders become engaged, the inclusiveness of their strategies, and the strength of their commitment and leadership.[74]

David Hornbeck understood the importance of the "public will" in improving schools. He made civic engagement one of the 10 components of the *Children Achieving* reform plan. ("Strong public engagement is required. Unless parents, civic leaders, elected officials, the business community, postsecondary educators, and the wider citizenry understand and support radical change, we cannot sustain it.") In this section, we discuss the strategies used by District reform leaders to build civic engagement in support of *Children Achieving*.

A CALCULATED RISK

Children Achieving can be viewed as a calculated risk. When David Hornbeck took the job of Superintendent in August 1994, he had reason to believe that he could muster the political support needed to win the additional funding needed to support his reform plan. The initial design of

[71] Hill, Campbell, and Harvey, *It takes a city*.

[72] C. Stone, *Civic capacity and urban education*, p. 2.

[73] W.C. Rich, *Black mayors and school politics: The failure of reform in Detroit, Gary, and Newark*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1996.

[74] M. Gittel, "School reform in New York and Chicago: Revisiting the ecology of local games," *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, (30)1, p. 138.

Children Achieving was based on the assumption that the state and the city would provide more dollars for the schools. At the time of Hornbeck's arrival, Pennsylvania had a Democratic governor, Democratic majorities in the state legislature, and Philadelphia had a Democratic mayor. The Superintendent also had strong backing from business and civic leaders in Philadelphia.

District leaders faced obstacles soon after Hornbeck's arrival. The teachers' union was highly critical of the accountability system and other reform proposals. One of the two daily local newspapers, *The Daily News*, took a hard line against Superintendent Hornbeck.[75] It ran a series called, "The Great School Debate," which criticized the District on many counts, including the lack of textbooks in schools, issues of school safety, and the high cost of implementing the new cluster system. A member of the paper's editorial board explained why the paper came out so negatively, so early in the reform:

This paper has high expectations for any city institution and we land hard where we see poor performance. I'd say it was a reflex not an overt decision. We value political skills and it was clear to us early in the game that he [Hornbeck] couldn't get things done in this city.[76]

And City Council members, who were reluctant to raise taxes to support the schools, fought back District leaders' requests for more dollars with criticisms of the reform plan and the Superintendent. Superintendent Hornbeck believed these obstacles could be overcome and District leaders pursued multiple strategies to press city and state political leaders to increase funding to Philadelphia schools. They intended to align the resources from the Annenberg Challenge and various other Philadelphia civic organizations with the District's priorities as articulated in the *Children Achieving* Action Design. They would leverage all available funds to show sufficient early increases in student performance and prove that the reform plan merited an increased investment of local and state dollars. In the meantime, they also sought to recruit many others into the fight for increased government funding. District leaders launched a public relations campaign to build broad-based support for the reform; they wooed business and civic leaders by offering them seats on various advisory groups and task forces; they funded community organizing to build grassroots support. At the same time they built coalitions and alliances to lobby for increased dollars for public education, District leaders also sought changes in the state funding formula through the courts.

STRATEGY 1: ALIGN RESOURCES

In February 1995, six months after David Hornbeck's appointment as Superintendent, the School District received a $50 million grant from the Annenberg Challenge. Among the conditions for receiving the grant were the requirements to: (1) produce two matching dollars (i.e., $100 million over five years) for each one received from Annenberg, and (2) create an independent management structure, preferably located in the city's corporate community, to provide program, fiscal, and evaluation oversight of the grant. The second requirement reflected the Annenberg Challenge's misgivings

[75] In contrast, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s editorial staff urged Philadelphians to give *Children Achieving* a chance. It played an important role in educating its readership about the progress of the District through its annual "Report Card" on schools. The first report card, published just two months after Hornbeck become superintendent, was the first public announcement ever of information about poverty rates, dropout rates, teachers' salaries, and student performance on the SAT-9.

[76] Media leader, April 2000.

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about pouring money into large urban school bureaucracies and its conviction that radical change from inside districts was unlikely. District partnerships, they believed, with their larger communities would bring resources, advocates, expertise, and accountability — all of which were necessary to reforming schools.

Superintendent Hornbeck turned to Greater Philadelphia First (GPF), an association of chief executives from the region's largest companies, to house the *Children Achieving* Challenge. GPF leaders were, on the one hand, reluctant to become so closely involved in the workings of the District and to assume oversight of the Annenberg Challenge funds, which dwarfed GPF's own operating budget. On the other hand, GPF was headed by corporate leaders deeply involved in the civic life of the city. They believed they could play an important role in supporting the public schools and they were buoyed by Hornbeck's accountability message, an ingredient they believed had been sorely lacking in the prior management of the District's schools. They believed that the District's contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers was a barrier to improving public education. Locating the Challenge at GPF offered business leaders ready access to the Superintendent and a platform for pressing their views. Ultimately they were persuaded to assume oversight of the Challenge. Furthermore, the Challenge's first Executive Director, Vicki Phillips, had been a colleague of Superintendent Hornbeck's in the Kentucky reform effort. She was recruited by him to head the Challenge, became a member of the Superintendent's Cabinet, and served on his Executive Committee.

As we have seen, PATHS/PRISM and the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative served as important outside partners to the District under Constance Clayton. Both organizations had pushed for changes in the District. Staff at the Pew Charitable Trusts who had been instrumental in recruiting Hornbeck were persuaded that merging the two reform organizations was a way to streamline outside partner organizations and ensure that their work reflected District priorities, thus avoiding the kinds of conflicts that had arisen in the high school restructuring effort. Warren Simmons, who was prominent in the national standards movement, was recruited to head the newly created Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF). Like Phillips, Simmons joined the Superintendent's Cabinet and Executive Committee. PEF's work became more focused on developing capacity inside central administration to establish and implement policies congruent with standards. It focused less on capacity building in schools (e.g., technical assistance to high school small learning communities, leadership development for principals, etc.).

A major principle of systemic reform is that a coherent policy environment is essential to widespread school improvement; without such an environment, educational excellence will be isolated to a few schools. Policy coherence is achieved instructionally by setting standards for what students should know and be able to do and then aligning curriculum and assessment so that what is taught and what is measured flow from the standards. It is achieved operationally by directing district initiatives and resources toward meeting the standards. Fullan described the role of alignment in systemic reform:

Systemic reform...promises to align the different parts of the system, focus on the right things, and marshal and coordinate resources in agreed-upon directions. The idea of systemic reform is to define clear and inspiring learning goals for all students, to gear instruction to focus on these directions, and to back up these changes

with appropriate governance and accountability procedures.[77]

Congruent with that strategy, the *Children Achieving* Challenge funds were used to create the District infrastructure necessary to enact the reform plan. A Challenge staff member explained the strategy and its rationale:

We put our funding behind things that will help the whole District. That's why we stay away from individual schools. So, for example, we put money behind standards and assessment and professional development related to that. Here I'm talking about professional development in large ways: getting the two networks [the Teaching and Learning Network and the Family Resource Network] up, leadership development, good information systems in place.[78]

The mechanism for aligning Challenge funding with District priorities were seven Work Groups composed of staff from the central office, clusters, schools, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, and, in come cases, representatives from critical partners (e.g., universities, PEF). Each Work Group was charged with developing priorities, goals, and implementation plans for a particular area of the District's work (School-to-Career, Standards and Assessment, and Technology). Funds were then allocated from both the *Children Achieving* Challenge budget and the District to cover the costs of the Work Group-approved plans.

But in 1998, the Work Groups were abandoned with the intention that the Superintendent's Cabinet and other committees would replace their function. But that never happened. Instead, decisions were made by the Superintendent and a handful of close advisors. This new plan resulted in a diminished role for outside partners as well as field-based educators like cluster leaders, principals, and teachers in establishing the priorities, policies, and plans of the District. Decision-making was increasingly isolated in a small group of people who shared the belief that coherent, aligned educational policy could remedy the problems of poor student achievement.

Raising matching funds to meet the requirements of the Annenberg grant presented another opportunity for coalition building. To a large extent, this opportunity was lost in Philadelphia. The alignment strategy made Annenberg dollars virtually invisible as the Challenge's monies blended with District funds to pay for District infrastructure. Elite support was at least partly conditioned on their belief that the Annenberg and matching dollars were not merely supplanting state and local funds. When GPF leaders could not point to specific places grant funds made a difference, they became uneasy and complained that they did not receive adequate or accurate reporting from the District on how the funds were spent. Other funders who contributed to the match became frustrated that their money entered the "black hole" of District financial record keeping and they received little credit or acknowledgement for their contributions. And people in schools were frequently unaware that the Annenberg money even existed and certainly did not know what it paid for.

In addition, because the Annenberg grant and the matching funds went to support new District infrastructures, there was little attention to building the capacity of outside organizations to support the schools. (An exception was the creation of the Alliance Organizing Project which will be discussed later in this section.) In fact,

[77] Fullan, "Turning systemic thinking on its head," p. 420.

[78] *Children Achieving* Challenge Staff, October 2000.

some existing groups such as Citizens Committee on Public Education in Philadelphia withered and died during *Children Achieving*. This absence of intermediary organizations presents a major problem to education reformers. A foundation staff member described the situation:

Philadelphia doesn't have the intermediary organizations that other cities do. We only have PEF, and no other intermediary capacity. There's potential capacity in the higher education community, but it's applied sporadically. It's very frustrating, especially when contrasting it with Boston, which has so much support in organizations and people, and a much better economic situation.[79]

STRATEGY 2: IMPROVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

As mentioned earlier, reform leaders were betting that the Annenberg Challenge grant and its match could be used to improve performance, and that improved performance would generate the political will to obtain increased state funding either through the courts or the legislature, thus allowing the reforms to be institutionalized and continued.

Student test scores, student and staff attendance, and student persistence did improve during *Children Achieving*. But student gains on the Districtwide test, the SAT-9, were uneven across the District. Elementary students made greater gains than middle and high school students. Schools with higher concentrations of low-performing students and students living in poverty made greater gains than other schools. Our research[80] indicated that:

- Fourth-graders made educationally and statistically significant gains. These gains were likely the result of all-day kindergarten and the implementation of a literacy program in the primary grades in which many schools used literacy interns to reduce the teacher-student ratio.

- In middle schools, eighth-graders made steady, but considerably more modest, progress than fourth-grade students during the first four years of *Children Achieving*. However, scores in math and science actually declined slightly in spring 2000, despite a strong emphasis on test preparation in classrooms. Our qualitative research indicated that changes in curriculum and instruction in middle schools were more superficial than in elementary schools. Furthermore, middle schools suffered from rampant teacher and principal turnover that negatively affected their learning environments.

- High school students, who performed abysmally on the first administration of the SAT-9, made little to no gains during the early years of the reform. Performance did improve in years 4 and 5. High school students' attendance and persistence rates went up.

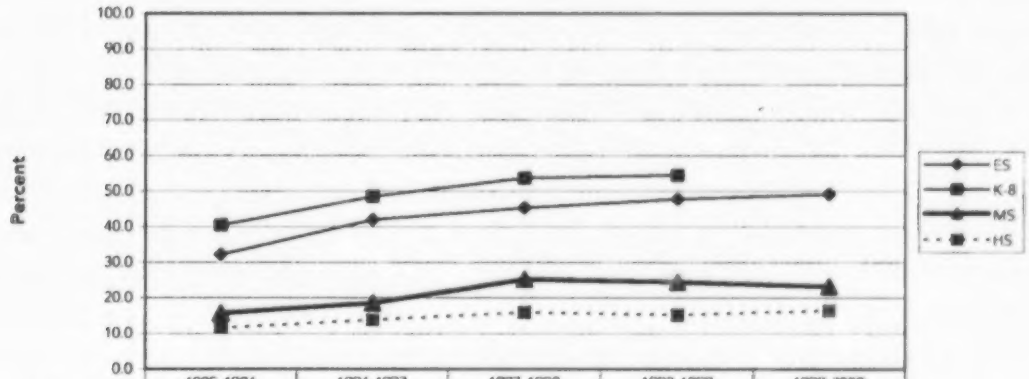
Figures 1, 2, and 3 present the test results by subject and grade level.

The improvements in test scores are noteworthy because Philadelphia had one of the most inclusive testing policies in the country. The District promoted the testing of all students. Each year the pool of

[79] Foundation leader, November 2000.

[80] W. Boyd and J. B. Christman, "A tall order for Philadelphia's new approach to school governance: Heal the political rifts, close the budget gaps, AND improve the schools." In M.D. Usdan and L. Cuban (Eds.), *Powerful reforms with shallow roots: Educational change in six cities* (New York: Teachers College Press, in press).

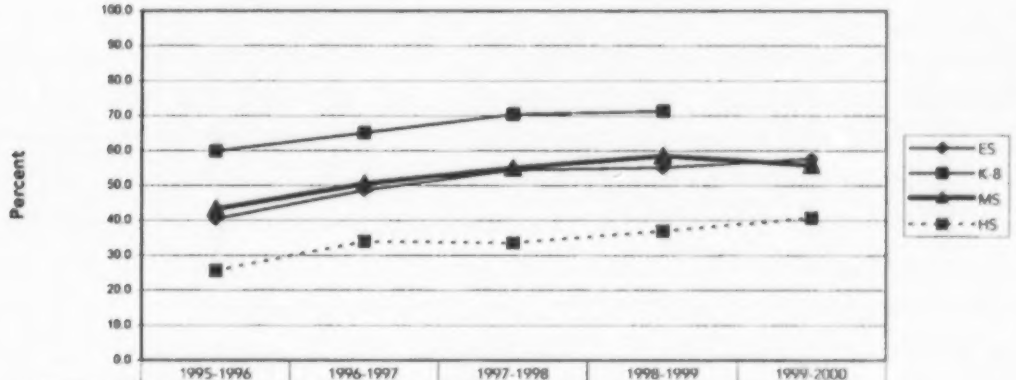
FIGURE 1. PERCENT OF STUDENTS SCORING AT OR ABOVE BASIC IN MATH BY SCHOOL LEVEL, SAT-9, 1996-2000[61]



	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000
ES	32.2	41.9	45.3	47.8	49.1
K-8	40.4	48.5	53.7	54.5	
MS	15.7	18.5	25.2	24.4	23.2
HS	11.6	13.8	15.9	15.2	16.4

Year

FIGURE 2. PERCENT OF STUDENTS SCORING AT OR ABOVE BASIC IN READING BY SCHOOL LEVEL, SAT-9, 1996-2000

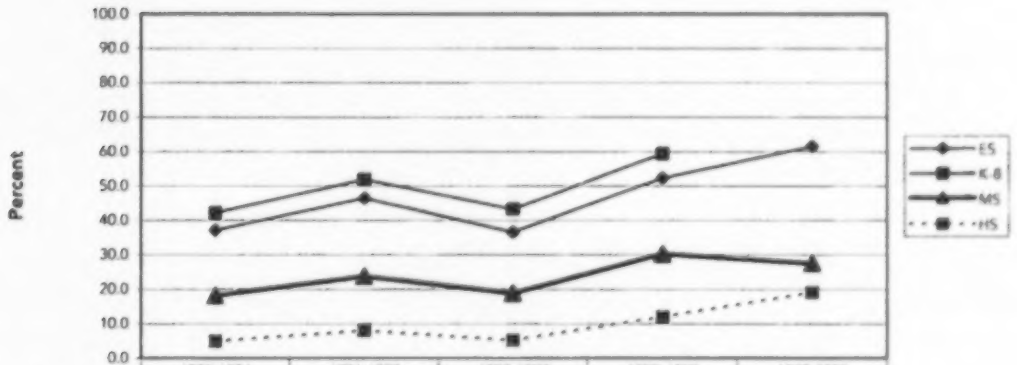


	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000
ES	40.4	48.7	54.4	55.1	57.7
K-8	59.9	65.1	70.4	71.3	
MS	43.3	50.5	55.0	58.5	55.8
HS	25.6	34.0	33.6	37.0	40.7

Year

[61] For Figures 1, 2, and 3, percent of K-8 students scoring at above basic in math, reading, and science for 1999-2000 was not available.

FIGURE 3. PERCENT OF STUDENTS SCORING AT OR ABOVE BASIC IN SCIENCE BY SCHOOL LEVEL, SAT-9, 1996-2000



	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000
ES	37.1	46.4	36.6	52.2	61.5
K-8	42.2	51.9	43.2	59.3	
MS	18.1	23.7	18.8	30.2	27.4
HS	4.9	8.0	5.2	12.0	19.1

Year

tested students increased, and analyses show that the additional students were generally lower performing. The fact that scores rose significantly despite this was an encouraging achievement.

There was enormous celebration in the District about the gains and a huge investment in telling the "good news." What were our participants' assessments of the reform's success? How did they make sense of the information on test score results and to what degree did the District's performance gains influence their assessment of the reform's progress? Approximately 80 percent cited test scores as an indicator of some progress, but only about half of them saw the increases as meaningful. These respondents believed that gains were an indication that the reform plan was a good one and should be continued with some modifications. Some commented:

There's no denying there's been improvement. The test scores have gone up. Not just the District's tests. If you look at the Inquirer's analysis of the state tests, Philadelphia made more progress than anyone.[82]

I believe the numbers [the test scores]. There was incremental improvement. Given the handicaps that David had to work under — some that he created for himself and some that were there already — my sense is that, however incremental, there was legitimate progress where it was most needed. And that's among the poor, and among the people who don't have a lot.[83]

[82] Foundation leader, January 2000.

[83] Foundation leader, August 2000.

TEST SCORES WENT UP BUT...

Half of the participants who cited the test score gains as evidence of some progress, also expressed skepticism about the meaningfulness of gains and questioned the celebratory statements coming from reform leaders. "The test scores are up, BUT..." was the view of this group.

There's been some improvement. Scores are up, but not enough and not fast enough.[84]

The superintendent has been relentless in his focus on achievement. That's the good side. The bad side is that the schools are not improving enough — fast enough or across the board enough.[85]

I think the progress, which I don't want to minimize, is around the low-hanging fruit on the tree.[86]

They have improved incrementally, at least the grade schools are doing better. The test scores seem to be better. But there has not been much improvement in the high schools. We were told at the beginning that there would not be much we could do for the students in the high schools, that they were already so far behind that we couldn't expect them to meet high standards. I worry that the students from the grade schools who have made progress will go to these same old high schools with the same old programs and that they will lose what they have gained. They will drop out and we will be no better off.[87]

These participants were reluctant to put too much faith in test score gains. Some believed that the pattern of early gains would not be sustained over the longer term; others that an over-emphasis on the test in classroom instruction would ultimately result in students who were not prepared for postsecondary education or for employment in adulthood.

In the short run, if you implement a new test and have short-term rewards with accountability indexes and so on, you'll see teachers teaching to the test. So short term you see test scores going up, but you'll see later if it really helps kids, or better prepares them for societal roles. Just because test scores are going up, I don't know if kids are any better prepared.[88]

The scores went up. The bottom line is student performance. The reforms seem to be making progress. But I worry about what children are learning. Maybe it is just teaching to the test. I hope not. I want to believe that there has been some real progress.[89]

Even though there was improvement on tests, people in the business community don't care about tests. They haven't seen results in the kids who are coming to them looking for jobs out of high school, and that's what they're really looking for.[90]

One higher education respondent raised critical questions about what the test measured and concluded that testing's influence on curriculum and instruction inevitably narrowed the educational opportunities for poor students of color:

Testing is a real problem. It's overly rigid. If you did that to our kids [White, middle-class students], we wouldn't stand for it.

[84] Civic leader, March 2000.

[85] Media leader, January 2000.

[86] School Board member, April 2000.

[87] Business leader, August 2000.

[88] *Children Achieving* Challenge staff, July 2000.

[89] Government leader, July 2000.

[90] Former School Board member, October 2000.

There's not equity for poor children. It's a cut-rate education for poor children. In order to engage poor children, we need to engage their minds, and testing doesn't do that.[91]

In summary, while a significant majority of our participants identified test score gains as an indicator of progress, they were evenly divided on whether the progress was meaningful. These findings offer a cautionary tale to policymakers and reform leaders about how they use test scores as evidence of progress. Citizens often do not know how to interpret test scores; they are uncertain about appropriate expectations for gains; they are skeptical about the means used to obtain gains and they are distrustful of District claims. As one business leader said:

The Annenberg people tell me that Philadelphia is their best site so I guess we should be pleased with that. I don't know what kind of test score increases to expect. I am not an expert so I have to rely on others.[92]

In Philadelphia, as in other urban districts where student achievement has been abysmal for many years, it was difficult for citizens to focus on performance gains when absolute performance was so low and when they saw and heard so much to indicate that schools were problem-ridden.

It's a struggling system. There are lots of good and committed people and lots of uninspired and frustrated people in it. It's uneven school-to-school, class-to-class. My sense is that it's improving, but it has a huge distance to go in terms of the quality of instruction.[93]

[91] Higher education leader, November 2000.

[92] Business leader, August 2000.

[93] Civic leader, April 2000.

Finally, in a highly contested policy environment, test gains — like any other kind of data — are frequently used as ammunition to defend or oppose a point of view.

STRATEGY 3: SEEK INCREASES IN CITY AND STATE FUNDING THROUGH THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Pennsylvania is a large and conservative state.[94] In the state capitol, rural and suburban interests have often clashed with those of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. This was compounded for Philadelphia when the legislature froze the state school funding formula in 1993, resulting in a steadily decreasing state contribution to local school districts.[95] In January 2001, *Education Week* gave Pennsylvania a grade of "D-" on funding equity in comparison to other states.[96] Only seven other states received a lower grade.

A loyal supporter of Hornbeck's and board member of Greater Philadelphia First at the

[94] In his case study, "Philadelphia: Prospects and Challenges" (see footnote 15), Whiting relates that James Carville, a political consultant to Bill Clinton and other Democrats, portrayed Pennsylvania as a state "with two great cities [Pittsburgh and Philadelphia] at either end and Alabama in between." Philadelphians often quote Carville in their depiction of the political reality that pits Philadelphia against the state capitol and upstate rural interests.

[95] Actually both urban and rural districts have suffered under Pennsylvania education finance policy, but only recently have there been efforts to build coalitions across the urban/rural divide in support of finance reform. In fact, after resigning as Superintendent, David Hornbeck spearheaded an advocacy group, Good Schools Pennsylvania, which is organizing in support of new state policies.

[96] "Quality counts 2001: A better balance: Standards, tests, and the tools to succeed," *Education Week* (January 2001). States were graded according to their contribution to equalizing funding across all school districts in the state.

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beginning of the reform described failed attempts to build a bridge to Harrisburg:

I went to Harrisburg to talk to Governor Ridge. The message that I was trying to get across to the state was, "We know that the District is not perfect. But we have a man running it today who is most unusual because he believes that he can fix it. This is an incredible asset for you. What do we have to do to link arms with you?" Honestly, Ridge believes that you can't fix the Philadelphia public school district. He'd rather skirt it by building an alternative system. In defense of Ridge, even if he had wanted to support Philadelphia schools, he might not have been able to politically because of opposition in the House of Representatives.[97]

A turning point in the relationship between the District and the city occurred in 1997 when District leaders, Mayor Rendell and City Council President Street, jointly distributed a white paper titled, "Realities Converge: This Year is Different." The paper outlined a pending fiscal crisis. It explained that the years of insufficient funding by the state and cost cutting by the District had reached a point where there were essentially no further ways to cut corners without cutting deeply into important programs. The language in the white paper was strong:

The School District does not take these actions lightly. Yet, Philadelphia's children deserve better treatment from the state...The state's continued denial of its basic constitutional responsibility simply leaves no alternative. The indisputable fact is that the Commonwealth has denied its moral and constitutional mandate to provide a thorough and efficient education to the city's school children...[98]

This paper set a new tone in the fight for funding; it made school funding a moral matter and laid the blame for inadequate resources for Philadelphia's children at the feet of the state. Later, speeches by the Superintendent escalated an already charged environment with the accusation that state funding policy was "racist." The District's white paper and subsequent rhetoric by Hornbeck enraged the Governor and other state leaders.

David didn't help himself with this process. I don't know if he could have been politically counseled successfully or not. He got himself in the crosshairs as a big part of this issue, and no leader can afford that. They absolutely hated him in Harrisburg. And that's not too strong a word. I heard people in Harrisburg say "so long as that guy's there, you'll never get a dime." Any contribution from the state would involve his departure.[99]

As this participant suggests, the battle for funding became an increasingly personal one, fought between the Superintendent and state leaders. One result of this personalized struggle was that the reform effort became still further identified as the effort of an individual — David Hornbeck. The Superintendent repeatedly asserted that he had the full support of Mayor Rendell and then-City Council President John Street in the fight for increased state funding. They initially made a public show of support, but in truth, Rendell was a largely "silent partner" throughout his administration. One civic leader noted, "Frankly there were years when Ed Rendell didn't even mention schools in his State of the City address."[100]

The Governor and legislative leadership were adamant in their refusal to alter the school funding formula or provide the

[97] Business leader, August 2000.

[98] School District of Philadelphia, *Realities converge: This year is different.* Philadelphia: Author, 1997.

[99] Business leader, August 2000.

[100] *Philadelphia Daily News* (2000, August 24).

money requested. They believed that the District used existing funding inefficiently, that the District's teacher contract was a major obstacle to improvement, and that the city needed to provide a larger share of school costs. The District argued that *Children Achieving* had not been costly and that the District had in fact taken significant steps to cut administrative spending. Overall costs had increased because student enrollment had grown, special education costs had gone up, and charter schools were a drain on District funds.[101] Although the state did provide Philadelphia with some one-time grants, these were small in comparison to what District leaders insisted was required to continue with the *Children Achieving* reform agenda.

Additionally, the Governor had quite different views on what it would take to improve Philadelphia schools. He believed that vouchers and charter schools were the remedy. Repeatedly frustrated in his attempts to get a school voucher bill through the legislature, Governor Ridge looked for other ways to bring market solutions to bear on the ills of public schooling. (See Sidebar 3 on page 28 for a discussion of the Governor Ridge's plan for school choice.)

When Superintendent Hornbeck threatened to adopt an unbalanced budget in the spring of 1999 and to close the schools early, the state responded with Act 46, a draconian bill aimed directly at Philadelphia. It allowed the state to take over the District if Hornbeck pursued his threat.[102] Rather than cutting the proposed school budget, Philadelphia leaders persuaded two local banks to issue the District letters of credit enabling it to borrow $250 million to keep operating through June 1999.[103] Philadelphians had taken notice of public education, and the city's schools were a key issue in the mayoral primaries and election, as noted in the *Philadelphia Inquirer:*

In a departure from past mayoral campaigns, when the schools barely rated a mention, this year's crop of candidates is talking often and avidly about public . . . education. And in keeping with the national trend, many of the prescriptions center on changing how the school system is run and financed.[104]

In November 1999, the citizens of Philadelphia elected a new mayor, Democrat John Street, who voiced support for Superintendent Hornbeck and his *Children Achieving* reforms. They also approved a change to the City Charter, which allowed the new Mayor to appoint all of the Board of Education members concurrently with his term of office.[105] In

[101] School District of Philadelphia, *Financial update.* Philadelphia: Author, 2001.

[102] All the unions opposed this bill, but it passed easily despite its numerous incendiary features, such as provisions for replacing the School Board and superintendent, suspending the teachers' contract, laying off teachers, and, in the words of the PaFT, "unilateral school closings and privatization by converting public schools to charter schools without approval by teachers and parents." (As quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, 1998, May 15). The strong support for this bill reflected the legislature's negative view of Philadelphia as an insatiable and "bottomless pit," as well as their antipathy toward the unions and Philadelphia's school superintendent.

[103] K.A. White, "Philadelphia budget passes, easing takeover threat," *Education Week* (1998, June 10), p. 6.

[104] D. Mezzacappa and S. Snyder, "Candidates agree: Mayor's control of school board should increase," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (1998, May 13).

[105] The mayoral race was very close. Street's main opposition was from Republican Sam Katz, a government finance consultant. Both candidates said that public education would be a top priority in their administration, but they had very different visions for how to improve the schools. Katz called for the removal of Hornbeck and looked to school choice reforms — vouchers and charter schools — as the only solutions for the struggling school system. In an

addition, Mayor Street appointed Debra Kahn as the city's first Secretary of Education to focus entirely on education issues.

In his first year, Mayor Street made education a top priority and took a conciliatory stance toward state leaders. One new Board member hailed a new era in the District-state relationship, "We must go to the state as a united front and humbly."[106] While Street proclaimed that David Hornbeck was his choice for Superintendent and that *Children Achieving* was the right reform plan for Philadelphia, the Mayor's actions signaled to some that he was ready for a change. As one union leader put it, "Street loved Hornbeck to death."[107] And a District administrator said:

Mayor Street wanted a new strategy for handling the politics of public education. David Hornbeck was confrontational and the Mayor wanted something different. He and his Secretary of Education and the President of the Board decided to look for a CEO-type to deal with the political and financial stuff.[108]

The political impasse between the District and the state came to a head again in the spring of 2000 when the District faced a budget deficit of $205 million. Under pressure from the state takeover law to balance the budget, the Philadelphia Board of Education made cuts and adopted a budget of nearly $1.6 billion which contained no new money for the programs the Superintendent felt were required to fully implement the *Children Achieving* reform agenda. As a result, the implementation of new promotion and graduation requirements was postponed and the number of days allocated for teacher professional development was reduced. Not willing to remain to oversee the piece-by-piece dismantling of his reform agenda, Superintendent Hornbeck announced his resignation on June 5, 2000.

Ultimately, Mayor Street's conciliatory approach, which included suspending a federal lawsuit charging that the state's funding formula was discriminatory, failed to win increased state dollars. Governor Ridge and his successor, Governor Mark Schweiker,[109] were steadfast in their insistence that the state would not provide more money without direct control over the schools.

The struggle between state and city leaders over financing the schools drained enormous time and energy from the hard work of instructional improvement, as District staff calculated and re-calculated what it would cost to fully fund the reform plan and provide Philadelphia students with sufficient opportunities to learn. Superintendent Hornbeck's passionate and shrill rhetoric made him the lightning rod of public debate. Other civic leaders were divided over what strategy to pursue and were reluctant to antagonize the Governor. The community did not unite around a strategy to achieve fairer funding for the city's schools.

ironic twist, Katz was appointed Executive Director of Greater Philadelphia First soon after the mayoral election and has since pushed for school choice reforms coupled with increased state funding from his position there.

[106] School Board member, January 2000.

[107] Labor leader, October 2000.

[108] School District leader, February 2001.

[109] Schweiker assumed office when Ridge was drafted by President Bush to become Director of Homeland Security after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

STRATEGY 4: BUILD A COALITION OF SUPPORT AMONG BUSINESS ELITES

In the early years of the reform, GPF leaders championed *Children Achieving* and its leadership. This help was crucial to the Superintendent at a time when the *Philadelphia Daily News*, some of the city's political leaders, and the teachers' union were offering harsh criticism of the Superintendent and his plan. By June 1996, 18 months after receiving the Annenberg grant, the *Children Achieving* Challenge had raised more than 90 percent of the required $100 million match — outdistancing all other Annenberg sites.[110] In the summer of 1996, business and civic leaders purchased space on the editorial page of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* to ask the community to come together in support of Hornbeck's reform agenda and stay the course with *Children Achieving*. The *Children Achieving* Challenge, in partnership with the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition, also funded a widespread public information campaign called the Philadelphia Campaign for Public Education.[111]

But the District-PFT contract negotiations of 1996 marked a turning point in Superintendent Hornbeck's relations with GPF leaders. GPF leaders were extremely disappointed that School District officials did not extract major concessions from the teachers' union. While they understood that Mayor Rendell was as culpable as the Superintendent for the contract, business leaders directed their anger at the Superintendent and began to withdraw their support for the District's reform agenda. A regional CEO and member of the *Children Achieving* Challenge Oversight Committee explained the perspective shared by numerous corporate leaders:

Hornbeck and [David] Cohen [Chief-of-Staff during Rendell's first term and a lead city negotiator in the PFT talks] promised us they were going to negotiate some changes. They made a commitment and on the strength of that promise, the business community raised the match for Annenberg. We kept our end of the bargain but they didn't. We wanted the right to assign people to schools without going by seniority, the right to make hiring decisions at the school level, some control over how prep time is used, and several other changes but we got none of them.[112]

Corporate leaders' disillusionment with Hornbeck also grew as they perceived that the District was not satisfying the priorities of the business community — efficient financial management and growth of business opportunities. Corporate leaders

[110] Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Research for Action, and the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, *A first-year evaluation report of Children Achieving*.

[111] Between 1995 and 1998, the Campaign, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, worked to "sell" the reform agenda. It published fliers and newsletters that gave clear explanations of *Children Achieving*'s components. It led print, radio, and television advertising campaigns that initially gave information about SAT-9 testing, standards, full-day kindergarten, and school-to-career programs and later heralded the District's success in improving test scores, reducing bureaucracy, and setting tougher standards, among other topics. The campaign also worked to support the public engagement efforts of other organizations by working with those organizations on several events, including: Don't Miss the Bus Tours, which brought hundreds of city and suburban elected officials, business leaders, community leaders, parents, and citizens into schools to see the impact of the reform on individual schools; rallies in Harrisburg to advocate for equitable funding; Kindergarten Read-in Days, in which celebrities, elected officials, local business and community leaders, and community members read their favorite stories to kindergarteners around the city; charter school forum, which was designed to explain what charter schools were to a lay audience. These events contributed to giving *Children Achieving* a greater presence in the local media and also increased public awareness of the reform effort.

[112] Business leader, August 2000.

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were frustrated in their attempts to get reform leaders to outsource a greater number of the District's service contracts to private companies. They believed that the Superintendent was on board with this idea, but his inaction in this area fueled the more conservative GPF leaders' perception that the District was inefficient and not a good steward of public funds.
Business leaders were also furious with Hornbeck for his confrontational style, which they saw as an inappropriate strategy for securing public support and state cooperation. Two business leaders described their reactions to Superintendent Hornbeck's rhetoric about the state funding policies and state leaders:

I was also upset about how David handled the politics. The business community felt that he was a good educator but a terrible politician. He offended people. He intentionally irritated them. He was hired to be an educator, not a preacher. I know he has a doctorate in theology but his sermons were misplaced...So the state wouldn't talk to him at all and we couldn't resolve the District's problems without their help.[113]

Yes, and he could have gotten it if he'd been a better politician or stayed out of politics. He could have gotten it if he'd given up more for vouchers. He alienated the Catholic school system. I believe in bringing everyone into the tent and not kicking anyone out, and David didn't do that...We depend on Harrisburg, and we won't get anything if we tell them they're stupid, ugly, and wrong...David should have said, "Look, we both want accountability" and worked from common ground.[114]

A *Children Achieving* Challenge staff member described the shift in the business community's stance toward *Children Achieving*:

The corporate community at the beginning, and along the way, had competing interests. I think that there was a struggle between the educational issues they knew to be critical to the city's long-term health and their own economic health. On the one hand, they wanted to support an accountability, standards-driven agenda. There was also support for the Governor — his economic stance and his educational agenda. The Governor's commitment to economic development is pretty solid, from the business community's perspective. It was a constant tug of war. Later, David's personality made even more of a difference for them [corporate leaders]. I watched the scale start to tip, and split the business community. Being inside, I saw where it came from, even if I didn't like it.[115]

Midway through Hornbeck's tenure as Superintendent, board leadership at GPF changed and took a more conservative turn. Changes in the regional and national economic picture were transforming the nature of business leadership in Philadelphia. Many local corporations (e.g., CoreStates Bank, Scott Paper, SmithKline, and others) were taken over by companies based outside of Philadelphia, which lessened the commitment of business leadership to the well-being of the city. In addition, city leaders were increasingly interested in partnering with regional leaders to address mutual areas of concern, and GPF had expanded its membership base to include regional corporations. This meant that the organization now represented suburban as well as urban interests. By June 2000, when Superintendent Hornbeck resigned, only four of Greater Philadelphia First's founding 23 CEOs remained. These shifts in the city's economic life served to isolate

[113] Business leader, August 2000.

[114] Business leader, November 2000.

[115] *Children Achieving* Challenge staff, October 2000.

corporate leaders from other sectors of Philadelphia's civic community.[116]
A funder of reform described the shift:

What happened was a rapid transformation from businesses led by Philly people to businesses without a vested interest in Philadelphia, or an understanding of the city.[117]

Several participants contrasted the new corporate leadership to what had previously existed. One explained:

David believed you could make a social contract with the business community, but he looked up and they were gone. I don't think the corporate community is playing a healthy, visible constructive role in public education. But they carry tremendous weight. It's a combination of factors. So few businesses are local now. And there are some leaders who came through the Archdiocese system. They want to keep taxes down and have vouchers.[118]

Business leaders insisted that it was the Superintendent's inflammatory rhetoric about state leaders and their role in the state's sorry school funding policies that pushed them out of the fold. Many were strong supporters of the Archdiocese system and were attracted to Governor Ridge's proposal for vouchers which they believed would be good for business by stemming the flow of middle- and working-class families from the city, thereby buoying the local economy and strengthening the quality of the workforce. They tried to persuade Superintendent Hornbeck to work with the Governor on this issue.

Early on, we tried to talk David into giving the Governor his voucher plan. He would have taken that card away and could have moved the discussion since we'd still have a tremendous number of kids to educate. The reality is that the voucher kids don't perform any better, but their parents feel better about the school. It's really a creaming process because the parents who take advantage of vouchers are probably already involved in their kid's life. Personally, I'm for vouchers, but it's hard when it's a magic bullet by conservatives. I want to implement it but not as a magic bullet. As a magic bullet, I'm not certain that it really helps the 10,000 who get vouchers.[119]

Civic and community leaders that we interviewed were disheartened by the behavior of the corporate community. One explained that business leaders' orientation made it difficult for them to be patient and persist in the face of serious social problems:

The business community thinks short term. They think in terms of quarters — the furthest into the future they might look is two years. They pulled back because there were not results soon enough.[120]

Others were harsher in their assessment of the business community's role.

Right now this corporate community gets off the hook. It skates. It's having too good a party right now. Maybe when Wall Street crashes, they'll realize what's going on. It stands to lose eventually. We've allowed the development of ways for the education

[116] The relative isolation of the business community from other civic leadership was confirmed by our network analysis of participants' sources of information about public education. This analysis showed that business leaders received their information from the newspapers and the Superintendent and were highly unlikely to interact with members of other stakeholder groups about public education issues.

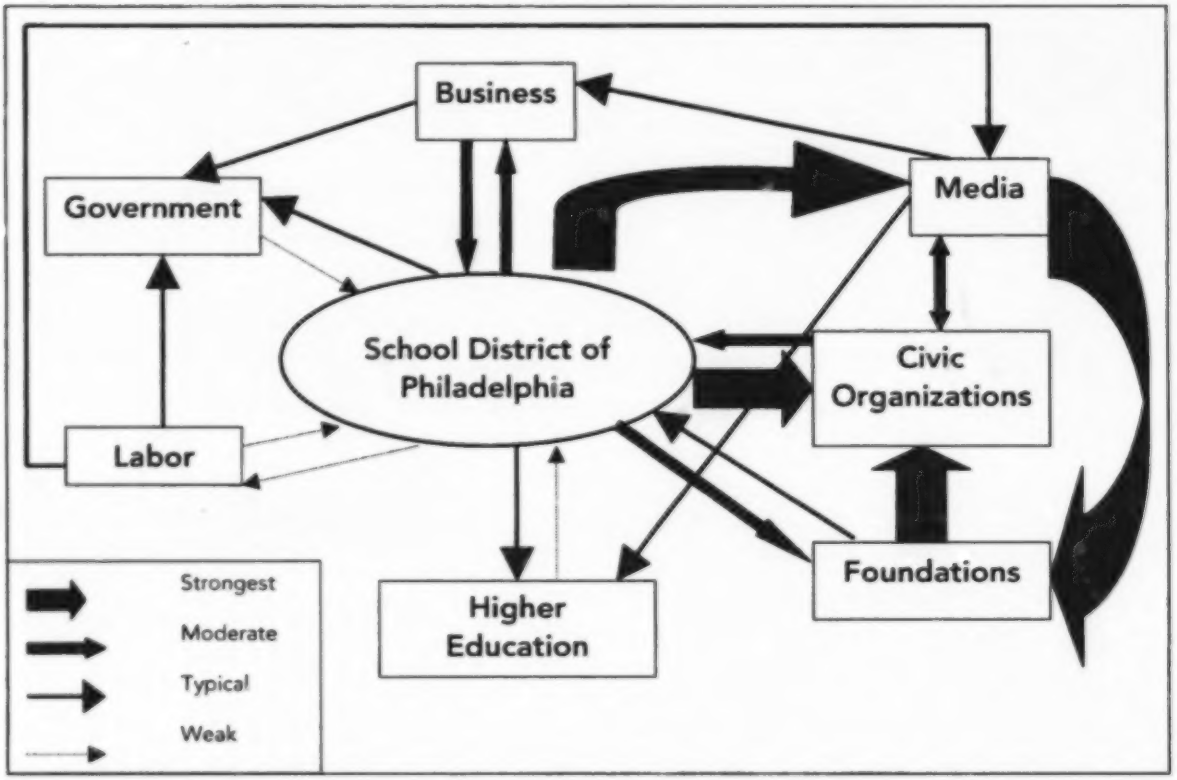
[117] Civic leader, October 2000.

[118] Civic leader, May 2000.

[119] Business leader, July 2000.

[120] Former School Board member, October 2000.

FIGURE 4. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE PHILADELPHIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS



of the labor force to come from elsewhere and government brokers for corporate interests.[121]

One of the questions that we asked interviewees was, "Where do you get your most reliable source of information about the School District of Philadelphia?" Figure 4 depicts the strength of the lines of communication among the sectors included in our research. The School District played the primary role in providing interviewees with information about the District and its schools. The media and community organizations also played important roles in providing the interviewees with information. There was moderate-strong reciprocal communication among the District, foundations, community organizations, and the media. Labor and business were the most isolated sectors; the information they received was from a very limited number of sectors, and likewise, they provided information to a limited number.

As this discussion has shown, business and civic leaders were initially drawn to the major ideas of the reform — particularly accountability — and the charisma of the new Superintendent. Despite efforts to engage civic and business elites in the

[121] Civic leader, May 2000.

reform, the business community's support for District leadership and the reform plan declined precipitously and business leaders became increasingly isolated from other civic leaders.

STRATEGY 5: BUILD A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The *Children Achieving* plan articulated a new vision for the role of parents in public education. In another report in this series, on parents' roles in *Children Achieving*, the authors explain that reform leaders saw "parents as critical players in school reform."[122] They envisioned parents as collaborators in reform and, in doing so, moved away from other approaches to involving parents either as clients to be served by schools or as consumers who 'buy' the best product (or school). This vision of positioning parents as partners in reform fit with the reform's emphasis on accountability. In addition to engaging parents in the process of improving schools, it emphasized parents' roles in holding schools, and District, city, and state officials accountable for the quality of public education.

Reform leaders also looked to parents' new roles as a strategy for building support for *Children Achieving* and building a lobbying campaign to press city and state government leaders for increased funding for Philadelphia's schools. Developing a strong base of parents and community members who would participate in and advocate for *Children Achieving* was seen as an important strategy to create local support for the reform agenda, which would improve the chances of increased city and state funding.

But there are many barriers to involving parents in schools and our participants were well versed in the obstacles:

We've also got to do more to mobilize parents. We need to help schools be more inclusive. You can do all the mobilizing in the world, but if they're not inclusive, you do more harm than good. There is a struggle around the notion of community involvement, what that means, how the district and schools can work with parents.[123]

We have to get parents involved. This is hard. They are afraid to come to school. They have bad memories of school. Many failed themselves. Some can't read. They don't know how to be advocates for their own children. But we have to get them involved in their children's education.[124]

Many participants recognized that educational improvement was unlikely without a public clamor for change, and that parents were key to that outcry:

My main criticism about Children Achieving is that you can't do this kind of reform without more widespread support. There needs to be a demand for it. There are other parents and community leaders who could support the agenda more strongly, but I don't think the District tried to engage those people and it cost them in the end. [125]

The reform's design and implementation included numerous components aimed at operationalizing the goal of parents as partners in reform. These included: the

[122] E. Gold, A. Rhodes, S. Brown, S. Lytle, and D. Waff, *Clients, consumers, or collaborators? Parents and their roles in school reform during Children Achieving, 1995-2000*. Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania, 2001, p. 1.

[123] School Board member, April 2000.

[124] Government leader, July 2000.

[125] Civic leader, April 2000.

inclusion of parents in activities and decision-making previously reserved for education professionals, the establishment of local school councils, the creation of a parent-organizing organization independent of the District, and a more open policy in the reporting of data about student outcomes.

Children Achieving began with a lot of promise for including parents in new ways. In 1995, parents and educators came together to develop the academic standards for what students should know and be able to do in different subjects and grade levels. Turning the development of standards over to teachers, parents, and community members was an important decision early in the reform effort. It signaled that reform would be a public endeavor and that educators were not the only stakeholders who had important knowledge about what students should know and be able to do. But in hindsight, reform leaders believed that the effort did not result in the grassroots buy-in hoped for:

There was a lot of energy put into the process. But at the time, we didn't see that the people who had developed the standards could be advocates and champions for them with other parents and teachers. That was a missed opportunity on our part. We thought we had done enough just to have them locally developed.[126]

We ended up allowing the public to shape the standards in an attempt to engage them with the reform. But in the end, giving the community control of standards didn't increase ownership.[127]

As these participants describe, involving parents and community members in developing academic standards gave them a brief opportunity to voice their opinions and have an important hand in shaping the reform. It did not, however, result in a lasting base of parent and community leadership.

Another promising element of the reform was the establishment of local school councils (LSCs), composed of parents, teachers, and a school's principal, which would have broad authority at the school level over policy matters, including budget allocation, safety and security measures, and facilities operation and management. The councils, which were designed to have an equal representation of parents and teachers, would give parents a new, decision-making role in schools. While the local school councils held potential for parents and community members, parents' roles on the councils were quickly limited when the PFT pushed for, and won, a 51 percent majority of teachers on the councils. Further, schools had difficulties putting local school councils in place. In order for a school council to be certified (and thus recognized by the District), one adult from at least 35 percent of student households had to participate in the election of parent representatives. This proved too difficult for most schools. Some of those schools created uncertified school councils, but these lacked the authority and decision-making power afforded to councils recognized by the District. Several of our participants believed that District leaders did not go far enough in creating the conditions that would bring authentic parent and community involvement through local school councils:

David [Hornbeck] wasn't radical. He was reformist. Part of his plan was to have a community impact in schools through school councils but in all the time that he was in Philadelphia, he didn't get LSCs in even 50 percent of schools. If that had really happened, and parents had been

[126] Civic leader, 1998.

[127] *Children Achieving* Challenge staff, October 2000.

given real authority, then that would have been radical.[128]

Local decision-making and LSCs never got off the ground. I'm not sure how many "real" school councils there are — that is, how many are actually participatory bodies. I would like to see more of that.[129]

Gold, Rhodes, Brown, Lytle, and Waff describe the challenges of forming legitimate local school councils:

The reform did not take account of how deeply unsettling the shift of power among schools, parents, and community would be to many principals and teachers. Reform planners underestimated what it would take for schools, especially in low-income, racially-isolated neighborhoods, to turn themselves around and work with parents as collaborators in school reform.[130]

A third promising element for creating new roles for parents in reform was the creation of the Alliance Organizing Project (AOP), a new organization devoted to building parent leadership. When the AOP was formed, Philadelphia was already home to a number of community-based efforts to improve schools, both on a neighborhood level and citywide.

Concerned about the lack of parent and community involvement in previous education reform efforts, the leaders of several education advocacy organizations formed the AOP, with funding and support from the *Children Achieving* Challenge. The AOP's mission — supporting a cadre of community organizers who would develop parent leadership teams in schools across the District,[131] matched Superintendent Hornbeck's vision of including community organizing as a component of *Children Achieving*. As a result, the AOP was included in the *Children Achieving* Action Design. Despite this connection to the reform effort, the AOP maintained an independence from the Challenge as its mission and direction were set by an independent board of directors.

The AOP's organizing efforts were never as far-reaching as intended. The organization planned to have organizers in all 22 clusters, but in reality, only became established in 12 clusters, with active parent teams in 30 schools. The new roles that AOP intended to create for parents met significant resistance from principals and other advocacy organizations, which limited AOP's outreach efforts and support within the District. As Gold, Rhodes, Brown, Lytle, and Waff describe:

Neither Hornbeck nor others in the central office anticipated the resistance from local schools, especially among principals, that AOP organizers would meet as they prepared parents and community members to become co-leaders in education reform...A number of principals jumped to the conclusion early in the effort that AOP was adversarial and would blame them for their children's educational problems. These principals made it difficult and sometimes impossible for an AOP organizer to work in their schools.[132]

Principals' resistance was made plain when the Commonwealth Association of School Administrators, the principals' union, made the AOP an issue in contract

[128] Former School Board member, October 2000.

[129] Civic leader, October 2000.

[130] Gold, Rhodes, Brown, Lytle, and Waff, *Clients, consumers, or collaborators?*, p. 12.

[131] See Gold, Rhodes, Brown, Lytle, and Waff, *Clients, consumers, or collaborators?* for a complete description of AOP and where it fit into *Children Achieving's* efforts to involve parents in the reform effort, as well as a case study of AOP's work in one school.

[132] Gold, Rhodes, Brown, Lytle, and Waff, *Clients, consumers, or collaborators?*, p. 19.

negotiations and Hornbeck agreed that having the AOP at individual schools would be left up to principals' discretion. It was not only school administrators, however, who resisted the AOP's presence in Philadelphia's schools. Some advocacy organizations, too, feared that the AOP would usurp their work with parents, and the fact that it was funded through the *Children Achieving* Challenge encouraged these fears.[133]

This resistance to the AOP led reform leaders at the Challenge to decrease their commitment to it, in favor of encouraging all groups working with parents to work together, regardless of their approach to involving parents.[134] Thus, although the AOP played a vital role in engaging parents in new ways in their schools, it did not meet the reform leaders' original vision for a Districtwide community-organizing effort.

A fourth promising element for changing the relationships between parents and schools was an increased sharing of information and data about student achievement and school performance. Reform leaders achieved this in part by publishing the test scores of all schools annually in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and, in later years, posting them on the School District's web site. In the first three years of the reform, attempts to increase information sharing were also complemented by the Philadelphia Campaign for Public Education's advertising campaigns. Civic leaders noted the positive impact of these efforts:

Education is much more on people's minds. There used to be despair and no attention. It is now widely understood that problems need to be addressed. Also, there is more open sharing of data and we can look at where schools are working.[135]

Participants also had reservations, however, about the real meaning of the data that was shared and how parents and community members could use it, echoing many of the concerns around test scores that civic leaders described earlier:

It seems that scores may go up but the school is still in the toilet in terms of its climate, and the instruction, and what kids are really learning. My hope is that the progress on scores is not a technical point. But change has not been dramatic enough for parents to have confidence in what's going on.[136]

Thus, while participants applauded the School District's openness with information about student performance and many parents and community members did become more informed about their schools' performance during *Children Achieving*, this information sharing did not always translate to increased support for the reform effort. While reform leaders' efforts to share information about test scores may not have significantly changed parents' roles in schools, they did create a system that was more open to critique and input from the community.

Reform leaders' strategies for building a grassroots movement of parents and community members who could advocate for the reform both locally and in Harrisburg fell short of their expectations for many reasons including: skeptical school administrators, divisions within the advocacy community, a lack of necessary supports to fully implement structures such as local school councils or organizations such as the AOP, and, above all, a misjudging of the deep cultural changes

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid, p. 20.

[135] Media leader, April 2000.

[136] Media leader, April 2000.

that were needed to build a grassroots movement and a misguided strategy for orchestrating it from above and inside the District. Reform leaders' commitment to creating new roles for parents in schools and school reform faded when the efforts did not result in large numbers of parents who could go to Harrisburg to advocate for increased funding.[137]

STRATEGY 6: USE LEGAL ACTION TO PUSH FOR EQUITABLE FUNDING

A final strategy identified by reform leaders was to seek increased funding from the state through legal means. Since 1997, the District, in partnership with the city and community groups, has pursued two legal actions against the state. The first was a lawsuit in the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court that claimed the state had violated its obligation under the state constitution to provide a "thorough and efficient" education for all children in Pennsylvania. This case was similar to many school finance lawsuits nationally. But in March 1998, a state court dismissed the case, arguing that it was lawmakers and not the court that must determine what constitutes an adequate education for students as well as how much money is needed to provide for it. And unlike courts in other states, the court did not order lawmakers to determine a fiscal remedy to the state's funding system. Several of our informants speculated that as long as state court judges are elected, it is unlikely that the Pennsylvania legal system would render a decision that significantly altered how public schools are financed.

The second legal action was a lawsuit, Powell v. Ridge, filed in March 1998 in a U.S. District Court by the District, city, parents, students, and various advocacy groups. The suit argues that the state's funding system violates Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits racial or ethnic discrimination by entities receiving federal funds. The plaintiffs contend that the state's funding practices discriminate against school districts with large numbers of non-White students; they cite spending gaps between Philadelphia and suburban districts as well as between school districts with similar poverty levels but different racial and ethnic compositions. This lawsuit is still active, although it has been suspended under agreements between Mayor Street and then-Governor Ridge since summer 2000.The city and the state initially agreed to put the case on hold for one year after the state agreed to additional funding for the District for the 2000-2001 school year. The suspension date was extended for 90 days on July 30, 2001 in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the city, state, and District.[138]

These lawsuits served to formalize the District and city's united front in the fight for equitable funding. However, they also caused deeper divides in the District's relationship with state leaders and those divides, as we have described, led to decreased support from business leaders. The state court's rejection of the school finance lawsuit made visible the battle between state and city and marked a turning point for District-city relations. The civil-rights lawsuit has been particularly offensive to leaders in Harrisburg because of the race-related charges it makes and also because, as a federal suit, it poses a more serious threat.

[137] Gold, Rhodes, Brown, Lytle, and Waff, *Clients, consumers, or collaborators?*, p. 20.

[138] The deadlines originally set in the Memorandum of Understanding were extended until the end of November 2001; it is unclear whether the lawsuit's suspension was included in that postponement.

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THE MISSING STRATEGY: ENGAGE FRONTLINE EDUCATORS

The School District's relationships with its professional unions, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the Commonwealth Association of School Administrators (CASA), were contentious over the course of *Children Achieving*.

It seems like from the beginning of David Hornbeck's reform efforts, the teachers haven't been on board. I'm not sure why, but the teachers' union is very powerful, and more often an instrument against change rather than for it. The District has to overcome that in order to make progress.[139]

Like the PFT — you want to get their support, get them to support something even if it's not the whole agenda. I haven't met a teacher that has good things to say about Hornbeck, which is a shame. These are relationships that could have been developed.[140]

Both the PFT and CASA offered strong objections to key components of *Children Achieving*, particularly to its accountability provisions. Tensions were highest when the District leaders attempted to reconstitute two high schools, plans which were ultimately halted by an independent arbitrator who ruled that the District had failed to engage in the necessary consultation with the PFT. PFT leaders repeatedly questioned the alignment of the SAT-9 assessment with the new District standards and were furious that the District never modified the formula for the accountability index despite their own protestations and the advice of an outside accountability panel. They also criticized the clusters as increased and unnecessary bureaucracy, and argued that the money would be better spent on early childhood education, smaller classes, and a District curriculum that would provide more direction to teachers on what to teach.

Unlike their union leadership, who did not utter a single positive comment about *Children Achieving* or District leaders in five years of interviewing, rank-and-file teachers saw parts of the reform agenda as very beneficial. More than 80 percent of teachers believed that standards and small learning communities had the potential to have a positive impact on their students. But District leaders were not able to capitalize on this support. One reason was that teachers felt that reform leaders were dismissive of their hard work. Their frustration began upon Superintendent Hornbeck's arrival.

David helped to make education a hot agenda, but he didn't give credit for what had been going on before. That wasn't appropriate or humble.[141]

Only four percent of teachers reported that they felt respected by the Superintendent. And this fact was not lost on many of our interviewees who lamented the lack of teacher engagement in the reform.

Can you act on the belief that all children are capable of learning without a huge team that is invested in the same way. It feels as though we've come a long way, but I do think that the failure is that there are not enough professionals who think it's [Children Achieving] their plan. A high school student intern was here last week who told us that her science teacher said she hates Superintendent Hornbeck. How did we get to that?[142]

[139] Foundation leader, August 2000.

[140] Civic leader, June 2000.

[141] Higher education leader, November 2000.

[142] Civic leader, April 2000.

They decried the stance of both District and union leaders toward frontline educators.

The District needs to figure out how to engage the good teachers. The Superintendent ignored them. And the District needs to make more of an effort to get the PFT on board rather than write them off. We're now in a situation where the PFT is disclaiming the progress on test scores. It's disclaiming the improvement brought about by its own membership! Hornbeck didn't invent accountability or reconstitution. When will the PFT realize this is not going away? It's a national trend.[143]

Not building the support for the program was problematic. I think he tried, but he could have done more. But then I don't think the business community or the PFT tried to help either.[144]

Teachers were also demoralized by a central administration that they perceived as out of touch with the reality of schools. They were overwhelmed by demands of the reform and its mandate to do so many things at once.

The communication piece of CA [Children Achieving] was always a source of frustration for me. I think they went forward way too fast for the internal audience to buy in and support the reforms. As a result, it took a lot longer for people to get it, and there was a constant undertow of disregard and disbelief.[145]

Principals were even more alienated than teachers. Alleging that the pay-for-performance system for school principals was not objective, CASA brought suit against the District. Mistrust of central administration was so great that CASA leaders would not agree to support a survey of school principals as part of the *Children Achieving* evaluation for fear that its members would be sanctioned for their responses. Foley summarized the situation:

Philadelphia leadership consistently underestimated the importance of developing and maintaining relationships with these important stakeholders. They discounted constituent perspectives, experiences, and ultimately, their power to hurt or help the School District. Other districts considering systemic reform efforts should work to collaborate with key stakeholders whenever possible and, at minimum, give respect to their perspectives and experiences.[146]

DISCUSSION

Superintendent Hornbeck knew that strong public support was necessary to press for and sustain the ambitious improvements he hoped to make. But grossly inadequate funding for public education in Pennsylvania and economic stagnation in the city created a harsh context for coalition building. It pressed reform leaders to show swift, measurable results to gain public support and reinforced their defensiveness about their efforts. Superintendent Hornbeck's all-or-nothing approach, and the lack of broad public discussion about the varied interpretations of the reform's intentions, both contributed to the impermeable nature of the reform effort and left people feeling they did not have a role in developing or revising the reform approach.

Strategies developed by city government and District leaders to build support for the reform and secure more funding from the city and the state proved largely

[143] Media leader, January 2000.

[144] Civic leader, September 2000.

[145] *Children Achieving* Challenge staff member, August 2000.

[146] Foley, *Contradictions and control in systemic reform*, p. 42.

unsuccessful. Failure to take into account historical strengths of the District and its accomplishments alienated many teachers and principals who might have, under different circumstances, championed the ideas of *Children Achieving* and led efforts at implementation. And leaders of the professional unions adopted an obstructionist stance toward the reform at its inception and became increasingly isolated over the course of the reform.

While most civic and foundation leaders continued to believe in the main principles of the reform plan, they were frustrated by Hornbeck's alienation of frontline staff and state government leaders. For many of them, the man failed the ideas.

Urban regime theorists divide political power into two spheres: private sector economic elites and government officials. In a capitalist economy, government officials cannot generate public policy without the cooperation of those who control economic production. Partnerships between the private sector and government constitute governing "regimes." The degree to which these regimes attend to social change and the redistribution of resources to alleviate poverty and its effects varies. It depends on the degree to which corporate and government leaders are engaged with community groups that promote a social justice agenda. Without interaction among these sectors, private sector interests are likely to dominate public policy. Increasingly, state leaders have become prominent in urban regimes, particularly around education as urban school districts are dependent on governors and state legislators for funding and are governed by state policies.

Over the course of the reform, the business community became increasingly isolated and alienated. Legal action against the state only served to further alienate state and business leaders and, given that state court officials are elected, was unlikely to yield a favorable ruling. Because Philadelphia lacked strong and united community organizations to advocate for more funding, it was hard to persuade business leaders that a redistribution of resources was necessary if *Children Achieving* was to reach its ambitious goal of all students reaching high standards.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

I think the ability to have a running conversation about achievement for all kids for four years running is a huge accomplishment. I think that people on the street have something to say about the education crisis we're facing...It gives us something to build on, but we have to remember that it takes a long time.[147]

Our research shows how difficult it is to build the resilient civic coalitions necessary for improving urban schools, especially in the harsh circumstances of inadequate funding. David Hornbeck was an attractive candidate for Philadelphia's superintendency. He brought star power as a national educational reform figure, and a passionate commitment to improving both urban schools and the life chances of poor students of color. He also had a strong belief that his systemic approach to school reform could turn around a poorly performing urban school system. The *Children Achieving* reform was adopted as Hornbeck's plan, but in its six years of implementation, it never became a civic undertaking; that is, an effort widely understood and championed by business, civic, and government elites, and frontline educators who would work tirelessly for its success.

Although Hornbeck's approach to systemic reform — the combination of standards, accountability, and decentralization — was being widely discussed in national education policy circles for its potential, it was not yet a proven theory of change. In Philadelphia, the selling of systemic reform as comprehensive common sense and as a package that "all had to be done at once," undercut the possibility for the input and accommodations necessary for building alliances for reform. It discouraged critical questions, reflection, and revision — all necessary for organizational learning.

From the time of his arrival, Superintendent Hornbeck faced difficult odds. Inadequate school funding forced a leadership stance of, "We have the best possible reform plan. We are making and will continue to make remarkable progress." But selling systemic reform on a grand scale contributed to widespread disillusionment when common sense didn't deliver the results anticipated. Many of the people we spoke with expressed the feeling, "We've done the best and the most that can be done; let the state take over."

There were missteps by reform leaders on many fronts — all stemming from the mistaken beliefs that a reform coalition could be created around a fixed agenda and that those who built the agenda should make all the decisions from the center about whether and how to change it. But other stakeholder sectors also missed opportunities to offer positive leadership. For example, the business community was ambivalent about its role in public education and failed to lead an advocacy effort for revisions to the state's school funding formula. Likewise, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers was reactive around its self-interests and never engaged in a constructive way around accountability and changes in work rules — issues that had and continue to have broad public support. And the isolation of these two groups from other sectors was an obstacle to coalition building.

COMMON GROUND

Certainly, the six years of *Children Achieving* were not for naught. Philadelphians know more about what it takes to improve schools than they did six years ago. There is a better understanding of the enormity of the problem and a

[147] Civic leader, August 2000.

stronger consensus around key ideas which together could form the cornerstones for future improvement strategies. Some of these ideas are the direct legacy of *Children Achieving* — a recognition of its accomplishments. Others are the hard lessons gleaned from the reform's disappointments. Current leaders need to recognize this knowledge and use it to shape strategies that have a chance at gaining legitimacy in the community.

In order of frequency mentioned by our interviewees, ideas for improving schools included the following: (The number of times the idea was mentioned appears in parenthesis.)

- Increase funding for the city's schools (35)
- Build coalitions of support for improving public education (27)
- Improve the quality of the teaching workforce (26)
- Provide access to data about how schools are faring as the foundation for public accountability (24)
- Set high standards for all students' learning (24)
- Continue full-day kindergarten and a research-based approach to literacy in the early grades (18)
- Seek changes in the teachers contract (18)

We elaborate these ideas below.

Increase funding for the city's schools. Interviewees believed that increased funding was required to improve the schools and student achievement. While many acknowledged that there might be inefficiencies in the District, they believed that there were unavoidable costs to ensuring that students had access to a high-quality education. For example, increased compensation for teachers and intensive attention to early childhood education were two budget items around which there was wide agreement.

Coalition building. Our informants were adamant about the need for coalitions, not finger pointing. They recognized that public engagement in schools increased during *Children Achieving*:

Education is much more on people's minds. There used to be despair and no attention. It is now widely understood that problems need to be addressed.[148]

There has been progress in building some community support for education. People are getting involved, and that is healthy. David did a good job initially in mobilizing the foundations and the business community. He got them behind his agenda. It was a big improvement over the previous administration when we had to fight to get a hearing.[149]

However, they were weary of accusations and counter-accusations. Most looked to leadership from the Mayor and the Governor to heal the political rifts and move forward.

The number one thing is the need for a citywide, if not region-wide, groundswell of support that public education is important.

Improve the quality of the teaching workforce. Teacher and principal quality was very much on people's minds and they knew that it would take multiple steps to address these issues including: stronger recruitment strategies, increased

[148] Civic leader, April 2000.

[149] Business leader, August 2000.

compensation, and effective professional development.

The emphasis on teacher development and training has been really important. It's so critical to kids being able to do well. It's the teachers who are going to make a difference at the individual level.[150]

Those who worked closest to the reform also named ways to improve professional development. They emphasized a focus on content and sustained professional development that followed teachers into their classrooms. But interviewees who were more distanced from schools had little concept of the intensity of training necessary to strengthen classroom instruction. Reform leaders need to be aware of this and develop strategies that will encourage big investments in professional learning and patience about their effects.

Provide access to data about how schools are faring as the foundation for public accountability. Informants applauded District leaders for being forthcoming with data about schools' performance.

The emphasis on monitoring the achievement of kids, and being open about the information needs to be continued. With Connie Clayton, they obscured it. David's actually holding himself up and holding the Philadelphia School District up for review.[151]

The public will be watching to ascertain how open new leaders are to scrutiny. Will data be readily available in ways that allow comparison across reform approaches? Will researchers, parents, and community members have access to schools to observe the quality of educational programs?

Set high standards for all students' learning. Informants remained supportive of the idea of standards.

Certainly having the goal that you can produce world-class education in a student generation needs to be out there.[152]

However, our research points to the need for discussions about what standards are and how they are manifest in the reform's approach.

Continue full-day kindergarten and a research-based approach to literacy in the early grades. A number of our respondents believed that *Children Achieving* had brought important changes in the educational experiences of significant numbers of the system's youngest students. They pointed to the establishment of full-day kindergarten and the attention to literacy in the early grades where there were also reductions in class size as offering a whole generation of youngsters a strong start in school.

There are children whose lives have been changed forever. If you were a child entering kindergarten five years ago, chances are that you're a better reader. There were maybe 100,000 kids who were positively impacted by full-day kindergarten reduced class size. You can really only judge the benefits and the progress by looking at those kids. The reform was intended to take a full generation of children to really take root.[153]

Seek changes in the teacher contract. Informants believed that there needed to be significant changes to the teacher contract. One government leader summarized the opinions of most of our interviewees.

[150] Foundation leader, August 2000.

[151] Foundation leader, August 2000

[152] Business leader, August 2000.

[153] Business leader, August 2000.

I think we have to make some radical changes to the teachers' contract if we're going to get any real changes. We need to change the contract provisions around hiring, transfer, and assignment so that our schools with the highest poverty aren't penalized. Also, I believe principals when they complain that they are held accountable and can't hire their own staff.[154]

LESSONS ABOUT COALITION BUILDING

Educational reforms often falter in the absence of strong public engagement. Understanding the reform strategy that preceded state takeover, how it contrasted with other approaches to improving public education, how it was understood by community leaders, and how they assessed its accomplishments and failures offers important information to the School Reform Commission as it deliberates the future of public education and seeks to build public support for its plan. As they craft new plans for Philadelphia schools and seek support for the hard work of sustained educational improvement, it's imperative that they heed the past. In addition to the strategies identified above by our interviewees, we offer the following lessons gleaned from our research on the *Children Achieving* reform:

Capitalize on strengths and prior accomplishments. It's tempting to condemn all that has gone before as a way to build support for change. This is why the baby is so often thrown out with the bath water in educational reform. But, starting from scratch wastes time and talent, ignores what has been shown to be effective, alienates the good educators who were responsible for prior accomplishments and could be leaders in the next phase of reform, and increases public cynicism about educational reform and its leaders.

Openly discuss competing reform ideas. Public dialogue about proposals for improving schools is central to building the public will necessary for the long haul. Educators need to adequately explain what they're doing and why. Leaders and ordinary citizens need to understand and be able to talk about different reform strategies and theories of action. They need to delve beneath education jargon to explore various interpretations of ideas. Only then will the city be able to have a productive dialogue about what will work in its schools. It is during such conversations that various sectors of the community can understand one another's perspectives, find common ground, and move forward.

Seek feedback about plans to improve schools and listen to what others have to say. As plans go forward, discuss their progress, reflect openly on accomplishments and challenges, seek input, make mid-course corrections, and explain them. An informed public is more likely to be supportive and to sustain their support over time.

[154] Government leader, March 2000.

APPENDIX A. RESEARCH METHODS

A research team conducted 42 interviews of civic elites between January 2000 and January 2001.[155] Interviewees were leaders from 10 sectors: civic institutions, current and former School Board members, businesses, foundations, District leaders, *Children Achieving* Challenge staff, higher education, media, government, and labor. (School Board members were also leaders in other sectors.)

The research team chose interviewees according to several criteria:

- Leadership in an institution that was involved in Philadelphia public education and/or leadership in one of the 10 sectors identified as important to represent;
- Knowledge of the *Children Achieving* reform; and
- Identification by other interviewees as an important source of information to them or as having an important/ interesting perspective on public education.

Interviews were semi-structured and generally took about one hour. The interview protocol was designed to elicit perspectives of the interviewees on the following topics:

- Public schools in the larger social, economic, and political context of the city;
- Sources of information on how the schools are doing;
- Understanding of the *Children Achieving* reform plan;
- Assessment of the District's progress during the reform effort and what accounted for that progress or lack of progress; and
- Prognosis for public schools.

The majority of interviews occurred during two time periods, one between January and April 2000, and the other between August and October 2000. Because the School District was at different moments of transition and uncertainty during most of the interviews, we also asked informants for their perspectives on the most recent events affecting the schools. These events included:

- **January 2000.** John Street's inauguration as Mayor and his appointment of a new School Board;
- **June 2000.** Superintendent David Hornbeck's resignation;
- **August 2000.** Threatened teachers' strike; and
- **August-October 2000.** New leadership structure for the central office, including the appointment of a Chief Education Officer and a Chief Academic Officer.

Secondary data sources included literature reviews, documents from the *Children Achieving* Challenge, and articles from local newspaper archives. Additionally, the research for this report occurred within the larger context of the five-year, multi-method evaluation of the *Children Achieving* Challenge. We drew heavily from insights gained from hundreds of interviews and observations in central and cluster offices and schools to make sense of the data collected for this report.

[155] Our protocol was based on that used by Shipps, Sconzert, and Swyers in their evaluation of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge (see footnote 51).

Sector	Number of Interviews	Male	Female	White	African American	Latino	Asian
Leaders of Civic Institutions	9 (20.0%)	5	4	5	4	-	-
Current/Former School Board Members	7 (15.6%)	5	2	2	4	1	-
Business Leaders	5 (11.1%)	5	-	5	-	-	-
School District Employees/Leaders	5 (11.1%)	1	4	4	1	-	-
Foundation Staff	4 (8.9%)	2	2	3	1	-	-
Children Achieving Challenge Staff	4 (8.9%)	1	3	3	-	-	1
Higher Education Faculty and Administrators	3 (6.7%)	2	1	3	-	-	-
Media	3 (6.7%)	2	1	3	-	-	-
Government	3 (6.7%)	1	2	1	2	-	-
Labor	2 (4.4%)	2	-	1	1	-	-
Total	**45 (100%)**	**26 (57.8%)**	**19 42.2%)**	**30 (66.7%)**	**13 28.9%)**	**1 (2.2%)**	**1 (2.2%)**

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